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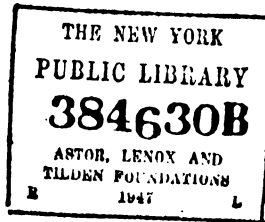
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BOOK ONE

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CHAPTER I

IT was dusk in the convent. All the stillness of the hour of prayer was deepened by the soft twilight coming through the narrow windows of the long corridor that led from the study room to the chapel. The statue of the Blessed Virgin above the holy-water font caught the last rays of light in the folds of her blue gown and dimly held them.

Cecily sat opposite the statue on the ledge of the window, and gravely watched the world darken. It was not quite time for Benediction and she had a great deal to think about. The convent was having a mission for its pupils and especially for the small class of girls who were to graduate next week. They had been exhorted to take the words of the missionary priest with great earnestness, for it would be his especial purpose to prepare these young souls for life in the world. The Jesuit, tall, spiritually emaciated, seethingly emphatic, had caught the spirit of his work. He had told them of temptation, of sin, of eternal life, of hope, of the grace of God, painting his pictures with a vividness of beauty and horror. And this afternoon in his last talk he had laid before them a choice of lives. There were three paths into which the life of a woman might direct itself or be directed, he had said. And the girls, hushed into immense seriousness and expectation, had hung upon his words.

The life of a woman in the world who did not marry

—the life of a woman of the world who married—the life of a nun. One must choose, though it seemed that eternal salvation was possible along any of these roads. The unmarried woman must devote her life to saving her soul and, because she had no cares of home or children, she had more time than other women to devote to the salvation of other souls. The affection and care which she did not give to a husband and children she might devote to the alleviation of suffering, to the work of a lay woman in the church, or the care of an aged parent. To Cecily it somehow did not sound alluring—these women sinking into respected, dutiful cares—it did not sound alluring. The life of a nun—Mother Fénelon came along the corridor, her hands held together under the loose panel of her black robe, her face half concealed by the stiff fluted ruff around it, her step noiseless in her felt slippers. She smiled at Cecily and Cecily, slipping respectfully to her feet, smiled back. She loved Mother Fénelon. It was true what the priest had said. Nuns were happy—it was a beautiful, peaceful, sure life—a life of blessing and fun too. Perhaps, thought Cecily, it is because I am not a Catholic that I would not want to be a nun. Yet even the Catholic girls—even the devout Agnes, who spent an extra half hour in prayer every day, kneeling with her long body bent in real and voluntary discomfort over the back of a pew—even Agnes did not want to be a nun. Cecily took out of her memory the other choice of the priest. He had not placed it last. The life of a nun, highest in his estimation, had come as the climax of choices. But Cecily felt differently. The life of a married woman in the world—the life of a married woman—a little quiver of excitement ran through her imagination—a married woman. Yet the priest had not made it attractive.

No, he had seemed to make it deliberately rather un-

attractive. Sacrifice, pain, endurance of pain—these the lot of the married woman. He pictured her with her children, teaching them the love of God and devotion to Him. He pictured her bearing troubles which the children brought. And he had said, "Marriage is a sacrament which has for its purpose the establishment of a home and the bringing up of children. There are those in the world who will try to make you believe not only that marriage is not a sacrament and that it may be dissolved at will, but that the bodies and souls of little children do not belong to it. Who listens to such counsels willingly, who allows them to prevail upon him is in a state of mortal sin."

And he had not said one word about love, thought Cecily. Lover's love, that is. Perhaps because he did not know about it, not ever having been married. Or perhaps he thought all such things were sinful. Cecily reflected on love and the little thrill ran through her again. Decidedly he could not have shown marriage at its best. There was love—being made love to—and of course he did not know, could not be expected to know about such things as engagements and weddings. He did not know.

The girls began to come into the chapel, and jumping up again from her window ledge, she took from her pocket the black net veil, without which none of the students might enter the chapel, and pinned it on her hair. Between the black folds, falling on either side of her head, her face looked out charmingly. She was eighteen, but if it had not been for her tallness she would have seemed younger, for her eyes were depths of unsophistication and her hair swept back in soft brown waves as simply arranged as a child's.

In the chapel Mother Barante began to sing softly the first hymn of the Benediction. It was the most precious

hour of the day to many of the nuns as well as to the students. Mother Barante's voice was one of the chief prizes of the cloister and the nuns told with gentle satisfaction of the triumphs Mother Barante had been promised professionally, of the cathedrals which had wanted her for soloist and how she had preferred to sing like this—here in this white chapel at Benediction. Cecily had often thought that perhaps, after all, the singer had chosen wisely. Here in this exquisite chapel where everything except the high oaken stalls of the nuns and the seats for the students was spotlessly white and polished, where there were always flowers on the altar and soft reverential lights before the shrines of the saints, was a perfect setting. People came from great distances to hear Mother Barante sing, and, worldly and ostentatious as some of the girls were, they all took pride in the fact that none of these visitors saw the singer—only heard her glorious voice from the organ loft above them, where she stood, her glance always on the statue of the Mother of God.

Chapel was over. The mission was over. It was supertime, and the girls filed in two long rows to the refectory hall. And, with the relief which came after the concentration of the mission, they were very gay. The nun who presided over the hundred girls was unexact and the laughter echoed from the head table, where the older girls sat, down to the table where the littlest girls giggled and chattered over their gingercookies and preserves. The enormously fat sister who waited on table smiled at the children and left them an extra plate of cookies. Sister Loretta liked the little ones best and they loved her for she was as happy as she was fat, and always ready to find a hungry child something to eat. Not having enough education to aspire ever to become a

mother of the order, Sister Loretta was completely content in being allowed to serve the others.

Cecily looked interestedly at Sister Loretta as she piled the dishes on her tray. What had made Sister Loretta choose the life of a nun, she wondered? She wished that she could ask her. She was anxious to find out more about this matter of choice of life—more especially why all these women had deliberately given up the life of a married woman in the world. There must be something more—there must be some objection which she did not know.

“Why do they choose to be nuns?” she asked reflectively, leaning one elbow on the table in a most forbidden way.

Agnes, sitting beside her, made the orthodox reply.

“It’s the holiest life—and the safest.”

“Safest from what?”

“Oh, temptations, troubles, sorrows.”

“Then I don’t see,” said Cecily, “why we don’t all just be nuns and make an end to it.”

There was a silence and then a giggle.

“Have to enlarge the convent some.”

“Be pretty dull outside.”

“Never get me to agree to that. Besides, there are reasons——”

Some of the reasons occurred to Cecily. She blushed a little and let the subject pass in a chorus of inconsequent and flippant comment. But later, in a corner of the recreation hall Agnes herself revived it. There were four of them—Agatha Ward, Madeline von Vlectenburg, Agnes Hearing and Cecily. They drew together in an earnest little group around the green shaded lamp by the divan and discussed it. For no one of them wanted that supreme choice of the Jesuit priest’s for a woman’s life—no one of them wanted to be a nun. Their faces were

vivid with interest and excitement. Madeline, plump and blond and glowing, had already a personal interest in a man. She would see him when she got home again, and now that she was through school—she paused thrillingly. And Agnes began to talk of love with all the ardor that she threw sometimes into her sensuous enjoyment of religion. If she really loved a man, said Agnes—. Agatha was not so sure of love. She knew a woman who wrote and who had a flat of her own and who deliberately had not married. A life-work was sometimes better than marriage and more interesting. The girls listened seriously, for Mother Benedict herself had said that there was great talent in Agatha's verses.

But Cecily contributed nothing. Deeper than the easy talk of the girls ran the message of the priest, and deeper still ran that strange adventurous wonder as to the solution of it all. The girls were choosing for themselves. They were not telling why one chose as one did.

Graduation week was busy. One had no time to think. The orderly days were crammed full and the life of the convent centered protectingly, admiringly, lovingly about the fifteen girls who were leaving it for the world. The simple parties, the award of the medal for composition, the medal for oratory, the coming of the parents, the special music for the last Mass, the unpacking of graduation dresses sent from home, the gentle flurry of the convent world absorbed the girls. It was only on the last night—the night before the final exercises—that Mother Fénelon, alone in the study room, looked up to see Cecily standing before her. Cecily's eyes were frightened and fearful and excited and the nun drew the girl down upon a chair beside the desk, holding the nervous hands in the hollow of her own.

"It's hard to go, Mother Fénelon, and I thought it would be easy. I thought, not being a Catholic, that

so much of it wouldn't matter. But it is hard. And I feel so afraid—and lost.”

“We keep you here in our hearts, dear—and you take us with you.” The old words, never tiresome, because always real.

“I know.”

“Is there anything especially bothering you, Cecily?”

“Yes,” said Cecily bravely, “the choice.”

“The choice?”

“You know. Of course I shan't be a nun, but to marry—or not to marry.”

The nun did not smile. She had been cloistered in the convent many years and, perhaps because she had time to reflect upon them, was wise in the ways of the world. And she knew the reality of even the adolescent struggle.

“Cecily, dear, Father Aloysius called it your choice. It is yours. But only ultimately. Events, happenings which we cannot foresee but which come to us under the guidance of God, affect our choice in most matters. Do you see, dear—you can't decide that now? You must wait and let events shape themselves—and only pray that your vision may be clear and your heart pure.”

A look of relief came over Cecily's face. She nodded. But Mother Fénelon still held her hand.

“You are a pretty girl, Cecily,” she went on, “and the world rates prettiness very highly. There are people—there are men—who think it is all that matters—that pleasure is all that matters. Don't believe them, dear.”

“What matters most—pain?”

“Neither pleasure nor pain.” The old nun transcended her philosophy in a phrase, “Life matters.”

CHAPTER II

THE Convent of the Sacred Heart was a curiously cloistral structure, situated in a manner quite unanticipated by its founders, in the spreading outskirts of the city itself. It was old as age went in Carrington—its wooden turrets and wasteful curves testified to that—and it had been built at a time when no one dreamed that the fields and pastures and wooded stretches which lay around the convent's site would be filled within thirty years by prosperous looking residences, sleek lawns and neat hedges. But so it was. As the red brick of the convent walls grew tawny brown with age, the city crept up around them and only the great expanse of its own grounds and that five-foot wall remained to keep the peace of the cloister. But the wall was high and the pine trees within it thickly green in both winter and summer, and the convent, growing richer every year as its property increased in value, gave as little recognition as possible to the modernity outside its gates. It had abandoned its huge windmill for modern plumbing, gradually gas had supplanted lamps and electric wiring supplanted gas—but there the obvious changes stopped. The parlor was still the severe old Victorian parlor of its first furnishing, the study hall still had desks with lid tops and the stone flagging of the corridors was hollowed with the footsteps of thirty-five years. Its shabby permanency gave it peace and aristocracy and this atmosphere was breathed by the nuns themselves, for they, like the place, were cloistered. There were those among them who had been in the convent precincts for thirty years—those whose

only voyage outside had been the most inconspicuous and hurried progress from one convent to another, when the Order had transferred them. There were those who came from France, where, until the exile of priests and nuns, they had taught the children of the aristocracy in high walled convents like this one; those who had come from England; and those who in the early part of their lives must have been simple American children. But no matter where they had come from, they were bound together by the same experiences and qualities now—tremendous religious devotion, a gentle love of seclusion and a fine, faint flavor of aristocracy of birth and education, for the order was no common order. It demanded a background of breeding and learning in its novices, and indeed a substantial dowry for them. All this because it devoted itself to the bringing up of ladies and could not risk the wrong kind of instruction for them.

The city, in a worldly, not too serious, way, was proud of its convent. It was proud of its cloistral bearing, of its aristocratic refusal to market even the smallest of its lots, as a tightfisted money maker may respect and be fond of some unworldly old lady who refuses to measure the world by his measure of dollars and cents. The esteem in which the convent was held was regardless of creed. Catholic and Protestant alike with pride pointed out the walled domain to visitors—and Catholics and Protestants alike tried to enter their daughters into its limited classes, if they or the daughters had a taste for that sort of education.

But the classes were limited and the work, after all, not college preparatory, so the convent did not compete seriously with the smart High School displaying itself, a quarter of a mile away, in the middle of its well kept lawns and two tennis courts (supported by private subscription). The High School did not consider the con-

vent at all a competitor any more than the convent would have considered itself one. The flavor of the convent was lost in the general breeziness and bustle of the High School. From October until June its halls and classrooms swarmed with life, with restlessness, with innovations in everything from hair dressing to pedagogy. Its daily six hour-periods were jammed with the efforts of teachers and supervisors and the propagandists of some cause or other, and distinguished visitors and class leaders came, too, to impress facts and emotions upon eight hundred boys and girls. From Monday until Friday it seethed with excitement, and on Saturday the basket ball games in the perfectly equipped gymnasium or the crowds cheering the football games in the field at the back, and the parties in the evenings kept the school humming.

One period of the academic year, of course, transcended all others in interest and in holiday excitement. That was the week before Commencement, when the festivities attendant on that event threw the whole building into confusion and anticipation. Commencement week had the evil habit of being preceded by a week of "exams"—a rather nerve-racking time for all the classes, for a great deal of information had to be investigated in the bright and facile young minds under the High School's control. Study became very real for a week or so, scholarship took on new dignity, and the amazing cleverness of both teachers and students showed through the blur of distractions. In spite of all their other interests, the students seemed to have learned a great deal about very definite subjects and they wrote, for the most part, very creditable examination papers and took due pride in them. Then the week passed and the spirit changed. The academic standard fell by the wayside among the things that counted not. What counted was to be pretty, to be attractive, to be a football hero (or at

least on a class team), to be a good dancer, to have had the greatest number of "bids" to the Commencement dance or to the dance the Juniors gave to the Seniors, or to have a part in the class play.

On the night when Mother Fénelon talked to Cecily and soothed her vague nervousness about marriage, the great High School building, half a mile away, was ablaze with light. It was the occasion of occasions in the school social year—the Senior dance. On the wide macadam street automobiles were parked in long lines and through the open windows of the second floor gymnasium an orchestra was playing indefatigably. Young girls in gay taffeta dance frocks, made scrupulously like the fashionable evening dresses of older women, and boys in well brushed and pressed clothes were dancing, and dancing well, with a spirit and abandonment to enjoyment lacking in many an older party. Yet, in the midst of all the color and gayety a few of these adolescents struck a higher note of brilliance than the rest, and the most conspicuous was a girl in a cerise frock. Her dress was cut a little lower than the others, and her hair, bunched low over her ears like most of the rest, managed to make itself individual by being drawn tightly across her pretty forehead, accentuating its whiteness and height. She had one other triumph of individuality. She had a feather fan, as cerise as her gown, and completely out of keeping as it was, it still made her an irresistible picture. The mammoth fan, the short, brilliant little skirt, the restless feet and ankles and great bunches of black hair made her a model for a poster. She seemed fully conscious of her effect and of her overcrowded program of dances, for it was as if her laugh and vivacity led the others by natural right. It was one of her moments of triumph and she never wasted them.

Florence Horton, commonly known as "Fliss," had

gone through High School on sheer strength of wit. She was the only child of rather inconsequent parents whom she ruled completely. They had given her no social position so, in her early teens, she had set about making one for herself. And so far she had done it. "Fliss" went everywhere with the girls of her age who came from wealthy and exclusive families, used their automobiles, dined at their homes, was a favorite with their fathers and mothers, and called their servants and chauffeurs by their first names. She did it by sheer virtue of the color in her which, like the color in the cerise dress, was outrageous, unsuitable and immensely stimulating.

In her academic work she was invariably in difficulties. There was not a teacher who was not perfectly aware that Fliss studied practically not at all. She "bluffed" continually. But her bluff was so skillful and sometimes approximated so closely to real intelligence on the subject involved that it was impossible to drop her altogether. Now and then she failed in an examination, tutored frantically and made the work up again, and here she was, graduating with the rest, though there had been some dubious hours in this last week when it had taken several consultations between the chemistry teacher and his assistant to decide to give her passing credits. She was through with school. College was an impossibility from the standpoint of work, even if she could have afforded to go, and the only thing which might have allured her—a year at some fashionable Hudson River boarding school—was quite out of her range as being even more expensive than college. So Fliss made the best of it and declared that she was glad to be through with books forever, and that she meant for the rest of her life to have a good time.

It appeared that there would be plenty of people to give it to her. She had already managed to get the at-

Stention of several young men who were well past the
om High School age, and, though she danced and coquetted
ial with the younger boys too, she was more interested in
ag those slightly older than herself. Old and young, and
s brilliant, she was a perfect type of the woman who ma-
re tures early and ages so imperceptibly that her reign is
> long.

r She was out in the hall now with Gordon Ames and
- they sat on the top of the oiled stairs in semi-darkness.
f The music had started but Gordon ignored Fliss's im-
patient little toe tapping on the step beneath her.

"I wish I didn't have to go to college," he grumbled.

"Why?"

"Because you'll stay here and flirt with every boy in town."

"Aren't you horrid, Gordon Ames!" Fliss pouted with great pleasure.

"You know you will—and then some day somebody'll marry you and there I'll be off at college."

"I might have something to say about that," said Fliss, "and I haven't any intention of getting married. I don't want to marry. I'm going to stay home, and after a while, maybe I'll do something—or go on the stage."

"You'd better keep away from that," said Gordon with much meaning and manly wisdom in his voice.

"I think I'd like it maybe."

"Yes, you would." He changed the subject impatiently. "Fliss, will you wear my frat pin?"

Fliss patted her knee with the ostrich fan, and regarded the pin. It was set with pearls in the most extravagant manner that a fraternity pin could be. But she hesitated.

"You know what that always means to everybody—all the girls laugh and talk——"

"That's what I'd like it to mean—that we're engaged."

"Oh, I don't want to be engaged."

"I suppose it would have to be awfully indefinite. But it doesn't have to mean that we're engaged, just to wear my pin. Lots of girls wear them when they don't mean a single thing. Please."

She took the pin from him yieldingly, with a graceful little smile of pleasure and gratitude playing about her mouth. The boy was watching her closely and his face flushed suddenly at her smile.

"And because it's our last night," he whispered awkwardly, "you'll let me kiss you——"

But he did not wait for permission. Most of the boys did not with Fliss. Fliss might not give you the kiss you wanted when you wanted it, but she could be kissed and they knew it. Usually they were silly enough, little giggling kisses, but to-night there was a new quality in Gordon. Fliss felt it and pulled herself away, a little abashed. But most of all Gordon seemed to feel it himself, for he released her and stood up suddenly, flushed and silent.

"I think this is what it is to be in love—really," he said, soberly.

But she had recovered her gay little self.

"If you act like that another time, I'll stop speaking to you, Gordon," she said, "and I'm going down to dance."

They went down into the crowded hall, but the boy did not dance again. Going home later, he crowded into the back of a big touring car with Fliss and three other couples of boys and girls, all excited and laughing, sitting on each other's laps and indulging in foolish little caresses and rebuffs. He did not touch Fliss.

And Fliss, still later, sat on the edge of the bed in the room of a friend where she was spending the night. It

was a rather luxurious room and the two girls made a lovely picture against its background. They discussed the dance and the boys.

"Oh, they are just boys," said Fliss, somewhat slightly. "You'll see a different type in the men who come to college dances, I suppose. Real men."

"I wish you were coming to college, Fliss."

"Too much work."

"But if you stay on here you'll probably just marry——"

Fliss grew suddenly angry. "That's the second time I've been told that to-night and it is perfectly absurd. Why should I marry just because I don't go to college?"

Her friend ruminated a little. She was a pretty girl herself and a thoughtful one.

"I thought you might like to," she answered simply. "And when there's nothing much else to do, the girls all seem to——"

"Because they are stupid," flashed Fliss, "of course they do. Like Dorothy Maynard. And then they have babies and get fat and stop dancing and don't care about anything except babies and food. If I get married I won't do that sort of thing anyhow. I won't get married unless I'm sure I won't have to. Anyway who could I marry?"

"You'd probably find some one." The other girl slipped into her bed. "My feet are tired," she added, "but I wish I could dance to that orchestra forever."

Fliss did not answer. She sat, watching her image in the pier glass opposite her. It was a strangely young image for one possessed of such crowding thoughts.

CHAPTER III

CECILY'S mother had been married twice. That was as it should be, for she had not managed to get much happiness out of her first marriage. Allgate Moore, Cecily's father, had been handsome and brilliant and well placed socially and his young wife, so very charming, so very much in love, had surely expected—must have expected—that all the good things of the world were to be laid at her feet. The wedding had been staged with considerable ceremony, as a picture of Mrs. Moore in the midst of banks of stiff white bridal satin still showed. But the aftermath had been less brilliant. The future prophesied for Allgate Moore had not come to pass and instead a great deal of dissipation and debt as well as a cherubic but upsetting Cecily had come to crowd young Mrs. Moore's life.

It was fortunate, people soon said, that nothing seemed to disturb or harass Mrs. Moore greatly. She had an air of moving among her own troubles as if they concerned some one else to whom she was lending every aid and sympathy. And there was no trace of hysteria to be seen by the casual observer even when her young husband died of pneumonia three years after they were married and left her nothing but a somewhat soiled memory and some badly tangled financial affairs.

The debts were settled as scrupulously as they could be and there were several relatives and friends who opened their doors to Mrs. Moore with a real sincerity in their wish that she would make her home with them. But that, it seemed, was impossible to her. With her baby

Cecily, she did a little visiting in various cities at first, but, wearying of that, took a small apartment in Carrington and managed somehow to pay her rent, satisfy her dressmaker, and tide over the three years during which she was rejecting proposals of marriage. She probably had more than the usual pretty widow because she had seemed to come so unscathed through the business of marriage once. To look at her cool, unlined face and watch the graceful slimness of her movements was to doubt that harassing affair of Allgate Moore entirely. But it must to some extent have made Mrs. Moore afraid, for she refused several offers of homes and fortunes which almost any woman might have felt too valuable to lose. Or perhaps she was more tired than any one knew or than she confessed even to herself. When she did decide to marry again she chose as complete a contrast to her first husband as could have been found. Allgate Moore had been the handsomest man of his group. Tall, dark, magnetic, he could ride, dance, or convince a stupid woman that the plans he had made for building her a mansion were perfection, with equal ease. He had flashes of brilliance in his work as an architect, but with his brilliance went an unscrupulousness, a readiness to cheapen himself by passing off inferior work, which had kept him from going very far. The man his widow chose as his successor was so deliberate a contrast to him as to be almost a repudiation of his memory unless it showed simply the versatility of her affection. She married Leslie Warner, a successful business man of forty who had distinguished himself by indefatigable work and unerring business judgment. He had in addition a keen sense of humor, a real kindness of spirit and of manner, and a leaning towards fine solidity in his possessions. Why he married Mrs. Moore after forty years of bachelorhood was a puzzle to many people, but his emotions were as

inscrutable as hers and certainly gave the public a chance for nothing more than conjecture. They built a spacious imitation Colonial house shortly after they were married and Mrs. Warner furnished its large halls and sunny rooms with quiet luxury, utterly disregarding the bizarre colorings and furnishings which had characterized her first home. Subsequently the Warners had two children, both boys.

Cecily admired her mother more than she found it easy to say and was as fond of her stepfather as he deserved. But perhaps, because she had come ready-made into the big white Colonial house, or perhaps because that curious characteristic aloofness had descended to her from her mother, there was something more than the difference in Cecily's surname to remind people that she was the child of Mrs. Warner's first marriage. She was four years old when her mother married Leslie Warner. When she was ten her mother, at a loss for proper schooling for her, dissatisfied with a succession of inefficient governesses and unwilling to let Cecily go to public school, had decided to try the Convent of the Sacred Heart. There were no Catholics in the family, but it was apparent to Mrs. Warner that these well-bred nuns would make no effort to proselytize her daughter and with confidence she intrusted Cecily to them as a boarding pupil, that being the only way they would take students. And so it was the convent rather than her home which had made the deepest impress on Cecily during the years of her adolescence. To be sure, she had come home for vacations, but the sense of permanency had always been connected with her life in the convent—with the going back to the quiet halls and definite routine rather than with the vacationing which had so kindly but so deliberately been made pleasant for her. She wondered what she was

going to do with all her time at home. Perhaps her mother had been wondering too, for after the few first days of Cecily's return, she came into the girl's room one night and somewhat uncertainly seemed to settle herself for a talk. Mrs. Warner was still a very lovely woman, not quite forty, and Cecily looked at her with the irrepressible admiration she always felt.

"I wish you'd show me how to do my hair like yours, so that I'd know always which way it was going to wave," said the girl.

Mrs. Warner smiled. "It's much prettier to see yours as it is," she answered. "Cecily, I've been thinking about you a good deal. Now that you are through school we must arrange things so that you will be happy. Later on we may travel, but this year your father is tied down in Carrington for most of the year, so I can't see much ahead except a few weeks in New York with me this fall, a month in the South in the spring and after we get back from New York I thought I had better give a rather large party for you so you could meet people and become an orthodox *débutante*. Would you like that?"

Cecily looked a little perturbed, but what fear there was seemed to be overlaid with delight.

"I think I'd like it," she said, "but, mother—you know I don't dance very well—or know a thing about society."

"The dancing we shall arrange and the other is no drawback."

Cecily's mother came over to lay her slim white hands on her daughter's shoulders. "Were you happy in the convent?"

"So happy."

"I want you to be happy outside of it, too. There's no reason why you shouldn't be. And I want you to be rather close to me until you marry, Cecily. I want you

to marry the right sort of man, one who will care for you and protect you."

"I've been thinking about marrying," said Cecily ingenuously.

Her mother looked at her aghast. "Marrying whom?"

"Oh, just marrying."

"You mustn't think about it at all, dear. I want you to marry some time. But put it out of your mind until the time comes. Just be happy and then, when the time comes when you want to choose a man, let me know him a little first."

"Of course," Cecily became judicious, "I may never marry at all."

Mrs. Warner smiled and closed the conversation rather rapidly.

"We can let that rest, dear."

She lingered to look over Cecily's wardrobe, criticizing with severity the frocks which Cecily put before her. Heretofore there always had been three new black Peter Thompson suits, a blue mohair and a white net dress each year. Now it seemed all the standards were to be changed. Even Cecily's loved blue sweater was cast into the discard. She was to have new things, an appalling amount.

She lay wide awake, too happy to sleep, while her mother went into the library and sat down before her husband with a gesture of mock despair.

"Cecily frightens me to death," she declared. "Here she is, all grown-up and absolutely terrifying. She is full of a kind of wisdom which I suppose reflects the nuns. Imagine, she has just been talking about marriage. Said she had been thinking about it."

Mr. Warner reflected her own dismay and question. "But where did she meet any men?"

"That's just it—she hasn't. She thinks about mar-

riage in general. I didn't encourage the subject. Imagine, at eighteen, coolly contemplating it without a giggle."

"Cecily doesn't giggle much. I wonder if she has a sense of humor."

"She doesn't giggle at all. But I think she has humor. She's not stupid. She's puzzling."

Mr. Warner smiled in a kind, wise fashion of his own. It was interesting to hear his wife reflect on herself as exemplified in her daughter—and funny—and pathetic.

"You were puzzling too, my dear—you are puzzling." She did not share his smile.

"She is like me—and I won't be able to get close to her because she is. I tell you that she frightens me, Leslie. If I thought she had to go through some things——"

"She won't, my dear. We'll take jolly good care of that. She shall be cared for."

He rose a little heavily. "What we shall have to do now is to knock some of the sanctity out and replace it with gaiety. I think I'll teach her to smoke and play poker."

So Cecily's secular education began; with her stepfather's wonderful and surprising gift of a saddlehorse which she must learn to ride at once to please him; with her mother's new and fascinating interest in her clothes and her own awakening interest in them too; with dancing lessons which made her quickly forget the two-step and Virginia reel of the convent; with a new kind of world to watch and explore and adjust to. She startled herself. In her mirror she saw not the girl in black sailor suits, to whom she was accustomed, but a new figure, a slim, lovely, dark haired girl, with wondering eyes and glowing cheeks, to whom every new frock seemed the most becoming. She was not alone in being startled.

Her mother had much the same sensation, having not realized Cecily's possibilities until recently. She seemed very proud to take her daughter about with her. So Cecily was initiated into a new routine. Instead of rising in the chilly dormitory and hurrying down to a breakfast of oatmeal porridge, toast and milk and then to an early class in French, she still rose early, but to go horseback riding with her stepfather and come back to a sunny breakfast-room where, over shining silver dishes and a great bowl of fruit, she and her mother planned the course of the day. Perhaps they would shop in the morning or sometimes attend some morning lecture which was attracting attention from society and lunch with friends at a city tearoom or go to a more formal luncheon to be followed by a *matinée*. This in place of lessons or basketball in the convent garden or chapel attendance. It was not a riotously gay life to which Mrs. Warner introduced her daughter. She had far too good taste for that. It was wholesome and the hours were as pleasantly regular as they had been in the convent. Cecily felt it the gayest of existences and it was not until much later that she discovered from how much cheapness and excitement her mother had shielded her at first, or how carefully chosen her pleasures had been. But Mrs. Warner saw to it that the city became conscious of Cecily as a new star on the social horizon, and that she was kept remote only added to her prestige.

CHAPTER IV

THERE was a well-bred society in Carrington—new perhaps in the sense that Carrington itself was young, but though the aggregate society might be new, most of its members were not novices in the enjoyment of beautiful things or in the traditions of manners. They came from a great many places in the United States, settling in Carrington for the “business reasons” of their sons or husbands or sons-in-law, and they went back whence they had come, on visits, establishing valuable rapports between the cities of their genesis and the one of their habitation. The women went to New York to shop, if their incomes were large enough, and, also, Carrington had its spring colony in California and its winter colony in Florida. All these interchanges were useful. They made of the mid-western city a place less provincial and less conglomerate. Carrington could indeed bear its social head with more pride and real distinction than many a larger place, overrun by parvenus. Bluffing was difficult. A newcomer always found persons who knew people of consequence in his former city, persons from his college who would easily place him. Yet, for all that, where bluffing was not involved to the point of being obnoxious, Carrington was tolerant and allowed the newcomer every chance to make good; was not too cruel in its comments, too exacting as to previous records. It had the laxities of the great world and many of the fine distinctions of the smaller worlds which revolve around the life of old cities. On the whole, a

gracious place—the kind of place that Europeans too rarely credit to the United States.

Cecily was high enough on the social ladder to be unconscious of any rungs to climb. And it had never been suggested at the Convent of the Sacred Heart that it was a modern and edifying pursuit to watch people swarming up from the ground and struggling to maintain a foothold on that ladder. So it never occurred to her that it meant a great deal to Fliss Horton to meet her, or that Fliss marked the day that she did meet her as a red-letter one of social success.

Cecily had been singing at a musicale at the home of one of her mother's friends. She had sung two short songs in French and she had been both worried and diffident about her performance. Still she did it admirably and looked delightful, dressed in a soft silk velvet dress of black, with only a silver cord to set off the exquisite lines of the frock and of her slenderness. Fliss had been invited to the musicale. Invitations came with reasonable ease to these semi-charitable affairs and they could be made extremely useful. She listened to Cecily singing, but her heart was in her eyes instead of her ears, watching Cecily's clothes and undoubtedly shrewdly guessing at their cost, for Fliss shopped much with her lips in places where she could not at all afford to buy. Later she met Cecily and told her how much she had enjoyed the singing. Cecily actually blushed with pleasure.

"I was frightfully nervous," she said. "It was the first time I had ever sung anything in French without going over it with one of the French nuns, you see. You imagine you are sure of your French until you have to do something like that, absolutely on your own. Then you get so scared for fear some one who really knows French will be listening."

"I don't know much about it, but it certainly sounded

beautiful and you didn't seem the least bit frightened."

Cecily smiled her thanks again and they moved off together, talking. There were more older than younger people at the musicale and Fliss was quick to seize on the other girl's temporary lack of companionship. She herself was looking very pretty—less overdressed than usual—and though any of the older women might have criticized the high tan kid shoes and the tight, short tan suit-dress, Cecily only admired its effect and found herself interested in the new girl, who, it appeared, lived in town, not far from her own house, who was the friend of other girls she knew—as Fliss skillfully brought out—and who had an air of piquancy about her that was very interesting and even charming. What Fliss thought about did not matter. She was working hard to make an impression, to be remembered if an occasion should arise on which she would want Cecily to remember her. And there was a certain effectiveness in the conversation between herself and the beautifully dressed convent girl, of which Fliss was far too clever an artist to be unconscious. Cecily might make her suffer in a way by the contrast—but it would always be "in a way."

It was late afternoon and a few men came in, most of them calling for their wives by previous arrangement, with two or three who recognized the occasion as a social one or had been called upon especially to come with their checkbooks and charitable consciences. Bachelors came, too—past the age of fearing such feminine social affairs, most of them—and then one who came unexpectedly, for no expressed reason. The older ladies beamed at the sight of him; the dark eyes of Fliss took on a more excited radiance; and the slow color crept up into Cecily's cheeks as a tall figure singled itself out from the rest and Dick Harrison made his way—his popular, friendly way—across the room to her. He was good

looking. Every one admitted that his brown hair, which would curl even at thirty, and his athletic figure were in his favor. But Cecily was beginning to see more than that. She had been meeting him for a month now at one place and at another—dances, dinners, theater parties. Dick was always an addition to any party, always desirable—she had quickly discovered that people thought that. Partly it was because he was wealthy and handsome; and because Carrington and Carrington's affairs were closely identified with all his interests; he was truly a favorite son. No mother frowned upon any attentions he paid her daughter unless she felt they were over-slight, and few daughters were altogether indifferent. Dick was excused for dalliance with years of freedom, because as a bachelor he was so desirable.

As for Dick himself, he had a good time and believed in his business, which had to do with promotion of mining interests and the development of the city, and had fairly tolerant political views, and lived with his worldly-minded mother in a thoroughly pleasant house which seemed to him far pleasanter than any of the apartments of most of his married contemporaries. He had no desire to get married at all. That is, he had had no desire until he met Cecily. He met her one night at her mother's house, and after that he sat back and let all the conventional things happen to him, enjoying each one of them extremely. He thought about her continually; he arrayed a new ideal of woman with all of her attributes; he freshened up all the old phrases about purity and love—about men not being fit for decent women. He could not keep his mind off possible scenes in which he and she participated alone and he blushed hotly and secretly at them—and recurred to them. He wanted to do all the things that men have ever done to win women, and to enjoy his winning of her.

So he had seen Cecily even oftener than she guessed and he had aroused a little whirlpool of comment around himself and her which he rather gloried in. In the eyes of the city there was no possible objection to any love-making which he might see fit to carry on, except a possible reservation that a girl of nineteen was very young for marriage. But with these two young people there was so much to make marriage easy that it was hard to make an objection out of youth, especially when Dick's ten extra years were added to Cecily's youth. Dick's mother was highly in favor of seeing her son married. Even Cecily's mother——.

Cecily's mother said very little. She put Dick next to herself at dinner whenever he came to the house and talked to him about all kinds of subjects, always making him talk a little more than she herself. She did not mention him to Cecily except incidentally and not at all as a subject for discussion. Now, as she saw him cross the room to her daughter, she crossed too, most casually. That to the mixed glory and discomfiture of poor Fliss.

Mrs. Warner smiled at Dick and the two girls and it became obvious that she did not know who Fliss was. If Fliss had been of the slightest consequence, Mrs. Warner would have known. As it was, she acknowledged her introduction with great graciousness.

"Have you, like Cecily, just finished school? Where have you been studying?"

It hurt Fliss to admit that sum total of High School, but she was far too wise not to be frank.

"I've just finished High School," she answered. "There was no use sending me anywhere else. I wasn't nearly clever enough."

"She's the infant prodigy when it comes to dancing, though," said Dick lightly.

After all, it was a great moment for Fliss. She was

part of an intimate group which was peerless socially—Cecily Warner, Mrs. Warner, Dick Harrison—and then the moment passed. With what was almost a gesture of dismissal, Mrs. Warner withdrew her daughter.

"We must hurry, dear. There are to be guests for dinner. Are you riding with me or walking? Did you get any exercise to-day?"

Dick cut in lightly, taking Cecily's arm, "She hasn't had any exercise, I'm sure. Let me walk her home, Mrs. Warner. And I'll get her home in lots of time because I have to speed on and get dressed myself if I'm to get any of your dinner to-night."

Fliss slipped out of the group a little awkwardly and, moving past the indifferent hand of her hostess, found herself in the street. The motors for the guests were gliding skillfully up and down before the house. Here and there, a group before the open door of a limousine were still gossiping, or three or four people turning away for a brisk walk home. The little tan figure, drawing a modish, unpaid-for fur about her trim little neck, stood for a moment on the steps, seeming to look on at the spectacle of her own social inconsequence. Then she too slipped into the shadows and on towards her own home.

A year ago she had prevailed upon her parents to take an apartment, for the old, brown-porched house in which she had been brought up had been almost intolerably shabby. It had seemed a very fine change to Fliss at first. She liked the nouveau art touches in the apartment living-room, the frescoed grapes in the dining-room, the mirrored door of the small, inconvenient bathroom. But the glamour had largely gone by this time. And to-night it was rather more faded than usual. To drive up to the apartment house door in some one's limousine was not so bad. To walk down the stupid street by which she must approach the house was different. It was de-

ly- pressing. Fliss, who seldom knew depression, had the
the visible lines of it around her mouth as she pushed open
stun the door of the tiny hall and smelled the frying grease
for of the lamb chops in the kitchen. She stood before the
you hall mirror, taking off her hat and putting it away care-
fully, hanging her suit coat up carefully too, with the fur
draped over it. Her mother came in to watch her.

sn' "Did you have a good time, dearie?"

rs "As good as I expected." The girl's tone was rather
pathetically tired.

et "Any one bring you home?"

"No, I walked—for exercise."

Her mother heard no sarcasm. "It's a nice night out," she said. "I just came in myself. I went to the White Sale at Barney's and then dropped in at the Majestic—Dorothy Danby in 'Other Men's Wives,' you know. It wasn't very good—not worth a quarter."

Fliss must have had a swift vision of the women who did not go to see Dorothy Danby—of Mrs. Warner dealing at long range with her dinner parties. Her face was dark and bitter.

"I hate this not being anybody—why aren't we somebody?" she broke out.

Her mother looked daunted. "I'm sure you go everywhere you want to—going to stay at the Spragues' tomorrow night, out all this afternoon, and there's that swell dance at the Mortons' next week—I think you have a good time. It's not my fault your father hasn't more money."

"It's nobody's fault—nothing is. But that doesn't make it easier. A girl can't do it all alone—she needs houses, automobiles, if she is to get anywhere." She stopped and looked at the stupid figure in front of her, which could not seem to understand its own failure as a mother. "It's just that I'm tired and I think I'm getting a cold

and it's so darn lonesome with all the girls away. That musicale was the deadest thing you ever saw."

She went to the kitchen and watched the chops sizzling, drearily, but none the less with a certain interest. After all, the walk home had been exercise.

CHAPTER V

BUT it seemed rather unimportant, except to three rather frowzy, struggling persons, what was happening to Fliss. The important thing was what was happening to Cecily—what did happen during those next three marvelous months of her life. However much Dick might have been willing to drift along through a prolonged love-making and slow courtship, however much Cecily's parents might have wished for such developments, it was soon obvious that they were impossible. The young freshness, the rarity, of Cecily attracted other men. There was one, one desperately in earnest older man, who even spoke to Cecily of marriage and drove her, white and trembling, to her mother. After that, a new diffidence, a new hesitation in her manner towards Dick puzzled him and stimulated him.

"I see nothing to do except let Dick Harrison try," said Mrs. Warner rather sadly to her husband. "I don't want any of the rest of them to take the bloom off Cecily with a lot of coarse, commonplace love-making. She's too young, but she's also too attractive. And it will come to Dick sooner or later, if she cares anything at all about him. I feel curiously helpless."

"Dick fills the bill pretty well, after all, doesn't he? He has a good record, a clean bill of health, and they would live here in town so that you could keep an eye on her."

Dick found things made easy for him—opportunity easy, that is. His love-making was no easier for him

than a man's serious love-making ever is. He felt it was a time which harrowed his very soul, a time when a new character and a new psychology seemed to grow up in him, decrying everything he had ever done in his life—a time of strange humiliations and reverences, soaring plans and queer discouragements. But the night came when he did ask Cecily to marry him and at the fright in her eyes regained his own courage.

Cecily did not answer him at once. He had laid his hope before her with a simplicity that surprised himself, for he had been full of fine phrases the day before. And then, when the moment came, he could only hold out his arms in helpless appeal and plead, "If you'll marry me, Cecily, I'll spend the rest of my life trying to make and keep you happy. I will—truly."

Cecily only looked at him, drawing away a little from his eagerness. A moment before she had been all gayety. But the very word "marry" stirred depths in her which were frightening. And again she was in the convent, listening to the Jesuit priest, hearing him tell them of the choices before women. She was afraid and allured—and stirred. Those same choices pressing upon her—Dick no longer just a companion, just fun to be with, but Dick wanting to marry her! It was enough to make her spirit draw back as it did. Dick could get no answer. And he had grace enough not to press for one. But Cecily's mother, seeing what had happened in the new awkwardness between Dick and her daughter, knew that the time for interference had come. She found Cecily sitting in her room, looking into space, much as Mother Fénelon had found her on the last day of the retreat. Cecily took her mother's hand as she sat down beside her and held it, and the simple gesture affected Mrs. Warner greatly.

"Trouble, Cecily?"

"Dicks wants me to marry him," said Cecily, without classifying.

"Dick loves you," her mother answered.

"But—marrying—ought I to get married, mother?"

"Surely not unless you want to."

"I don't—not want to. And he—Dick makes it seem possible. But I don't know anything about it, mother. I wouldn't know how to be married."

There were tears in her mother's eyes now.

"A little of marriage I can tell you about, Cecily dear—but the rest you learn from your husband—the rest you and he learn together. And that's why it's hard to help you now, dear. If Dick is the person you want to learn with, you should marry him. But I can't tell whether he is or not. If he isn't, he mustn't be your husband. As far as an outsider can tell—yes, even I must be an outsider here—he would be a good husband for you. But unless you want him, unless you want him badly, there's no good in it."

The reserved, the aloof Mrs. Warner had broken some barrier to talk like that. She seemed to feel the unaccustomed mood and changed quickly—again Cecily's quiet, controlled mother.

"Go to bed now, Cecily," she finished. "When you see more of Dick you can tell better. And I won't let him hurry or worry you. And I want you to have a good rest."

They all made it as easy as possible for Cecily. As easy as possible. Dick did not harass her. Her mother would have prevented that even if he had had the inclination. Mr. and Mrs. Warner took her away for a few weeks to New York, and, if she thought of the decision before her, she did it without their pressing it upon her. As a matter of fact she did think about it constantly. She found she missed Dick and in her deft, direct, mental

way knew that meant a great deal. Then there was a memory which clung to her consciousness and would not be detached. It was the memory of Dick's embrace the night he had asked her to marry him. It was a unique memory. When she thought about it it was not like recalling a single happening. It was like looking backward and forward over the whole of her life—as if all life had been leading up to this, as if all life would point back to it. But still the indefinable fear, the indefinable threat of the priest who had seemed to be deliberately making marriage hard, persisted. She thought a great deal in the gaps between shopping and theater-going in New York.

They came back to Carrington after three weeks and Dick came to see her at once. He looked a trifle thinner—a trifle more eager even—and he was obviously impatient of the presence of others. When he and Cecily were finally alone, a throbbing silence settled over them. Then Dick put out his hands and took hers.

"Have you thought about me at all, Cecily?"

"Almost all the time I thought."

"And—you—how do you feel about it now? Not afraid any longer? Ready to trust me—to let me love you, Cecily—Cecily?"

She lifted her eyes to his and let him decide.

After that it became much different and nearly all joy. Suddenly all the ominousness, the queerness, the vague fears disappeared. It was partly knowing Dick so much better, of course; partly becoming used to the gay, adoring laugh he had for her and more than that, to the touch of his arms and the rapture in his voice when he and she were alone and he could make love to her; it was partly meeting the approbation of every one, seeing in the eyes of girls and of women that they thought she had something which they would like to have, and partly the

gay excitement of plans and arrangements. Dick was impatient now. He wanted to be married at the first possible moment; he had all sorts of contradictory plans and suggestions for a home and he was full of enthusiasm which would scarcely bear restraining. But Cecily's marriage would, under her mother's guidance, have neither haste nor incongruity. There was Cecily's wardrobe, Cecily's house and the marriage itself to be attended to in due course. Dick might plan, but he had no deciding voice in any of these matters.

The marriage was to take place in the early summer, and then, too, the house would be ready for occupancy. The house itself was the gift of the Warners. It was not new and it was not at all the sort of place which most brides began with, for it was large and had much more space inside and out than the usual bridal apartment. Its red brick walks surrounded the long, gray shingled house and garage neatly, and there were flowers and shrubs and trees. When Cecily first saw the house, new sensations woke in her. She turned to Dick with a strange sense of proprietorship for the first time. It was as if suddenly she saw a responsibility of her own in marriage. Thereafter came interviews with decorators and painters and upholsterers and visits to furnishers' shops. Happiest of all was Mrs. Warner. Cecily's house was to be a radiant place, full of sunshine and happy color. Cecily's bridal wardrobe was to be exquisite and simple and beautiful. Cecily's wedding——

Cecily's wedding fell upon one beautiful day in June. The sun had been shining all day so that the evening was permeated with a softness and clearness that seemed left over from the radiance of the day. In the church great banks of green set off the tall candles, burning with flames that went straight up, and faintly fragrant, yellow pink roses filled the niches in the walls. It was one

of those esthetically religious weddings in which the religion depends largely on the success of the esthetic effect. Cecily visualized the place as a chapel and wished that she could have heard the cloistered nuns singing as she approached. But the wish was vague. The plans were very completely made and she must carry them out to the satisfaction of herself and everybody. Then, as she went down the aisle she saw Dick—strange, familiar, Dick crowding out every one else. She realized suddenly that she and Dick were responsible for the future; she remembered that she was going away with Dick to-night, and she had two immense, sudden desires in conflict—one to run out of the church and hide herself where she would never be found and one to get close to Dick for comfort. But her mind was telling her how to act. She was going down the aisle, catching a fleeting glimpse of her new mother-in-law, standing beside her stepfather, repeating words which she had memorized, hearing Dick repeat them too, though he sounded strangely far off. She was going out of the church now and forgetting to look up and smile as she had said she was going to. Almost at the back of the church she remembered. She looked up and her eyes met the curious, envying eyes of Fliss. Cecily smiled. She had asked her mother to ask Fliss to the wedding for she had seen her a few times after the musicale and always been interested. She smiled and passed on. Fliss drew a long breath and turned to the man beside her.

"Beautiful, wasn't she? And she has everything in the world—everything ahead of her!"

Everything ahead of her. So Cecily felt in the dim confusion of the Pullman. Curtains swung from the berths already occupied when she and Dick finally boarded their train. The electric lights seemed strangely dull after the brightness of the house she had left. She was

alone in their drawing-room waiting for the porter to bring in their bags. Their bags—Dick's too, of course. She wished he would come—would stay away—would come.

He came in marshaling a smiling, well-tipped porter. Then the porter was gone again and her husband, with a strangely timorous look on his face, was standing by her. He lifted her hand to his lips and then, as their eyes met wonderingly, dropped to his knees with his curly head in her lap.

CHAPTER VI

EVEN the unhappy, disillusioned man or woman who looks back at a wrecked marriage with cynicism or disgust or who does not look back at all because it is too painful, will, none the less, carry about with him until the end of his life a few poignant memories which never lose their power to thrill him anew, though desire to relieve them may be gone or the companion of his memories have become ludicrous. It is the fat dowager still able to blush at her daughter's teasing inquiry about the time father asked her to marry him, it is the faded, washed-out woman who sobs in the movies as the heroine tells the hero that she is going to have a child and they fade out in an embrace, it is the old gentleman who grows sentimental over a popular song, who bears this out. Troubles, bitternesses, grief—temporary drama, mock drama they may be—but the drama of undying poetry is in love and not in disillusion or hate.

The hesitation of the first steps of marriage, the explanation of love, the abandonment, the amazing tenderesses, the secret rivalry in affection for each other—those are the moments of greatest dramatic intensity. Stories give us, as is natural for them, perhaps, the odd cases—the ill-matched couples—but for the great number of people who follow nature and are led by her there never comes again greater poignancy in life than steeped the wedding night and the hour of the birth of their children. More excitement, more pleasure, more joy at other times perhaps—but it is then that human life sounds its depths. It is the memory of such times which may

account, more than the pressure of society or the weight of habit, for the strange fidelities of men to unworthy women and of women to unworthy men.

Cecily stored her memory with very beautiful things during the first days of marriage. There were times when she walked in an exalted dream. She had become immensely conscious of herself. It seemed to her that she could not walk unnoticed on the street—the glory of her happiness must show to other people. Fear, the strange fears in her contemplation of her marriage, the nervous fears during the ceremony had been blown away in a very wind of happiness. She had no care, no thought except Dick and their amazing joy in each other. They had gone to New York and then, after a few days, motored up the Hudson, keeping to the State road only as the fancy took them and wandering off for half days along country by-ways, leading through valleys of farms and steep little towns set on hills. Through the long evenings of slow twilight they drove by the river, and when it was dark there was some hotel or road house transformed by the magic of the journey into a hospitable inn for wayfarers. And night came and they were in strange rooms but always with the new warmth of intimacy contrasting with the strangeness of the setting and making them closer together. So on through a golden month—a month which held moments of sacredness, of steady joy, of sheer laughter.

Dick was making himself real to Cecily and enjoying her as he had never enjoyed anything before. There was not so much glamour for him as for her, partly because he was a man and partly because the world kept its proportions for Dick almost always. As a lover and a suitor he had done exactly what a lover and suitor should do—tortured himself with feelings of unworthiness and with doubts and lain awake with his hopes. As a husband, his

feelings changed. He was no longer doubtful, no longer bothered about unworthiness. He was Cecily's husband and radiantly, boyishly satisfied. Marriage was accomplished in his life and it was all that was delightful. And Cecily was the most beautiful and charming of women. His feeling was partly inspired directly by his wife; also it went with the code of men in marriage. There was room in his mind for other things, too—for business plans, for politics.

Cecily had no code. To her all that had happened had happened to her first and singly, of all women in the world. She could not conceive of grouping her experiences or sharing them with all women. Nor did she have thoughts which did not concern Dick. He had suffused her mind. She was very innocent and her husband, entering her mind and heart, had taken complete possession. She thought through him, and it never occurred to her that she was subordinating herself. She wanted to share everything in the world with him and to identify herself with him. Into her first month of marriage she brought exactly the elements to make it perfect and if she failed to establish exactly the proper basis for a modern marriage she built for herself and her husband a perfect memory and dropped an anchor thereby.

Dick had glimpses of insight. "I wonder if you are really very innocent or very wise," he said laughingly to her. "Sometimes I guess one and sometimes the other. You avoid disagreeable things so—so exquisitely. Most women are so controversial nowadays."

"I've nothing to be controversial about. Besides I don't like controversies."

"Wonderful woman!" admired Dick.

He enjoyed making Cecily presents, took delight in the almost childish pleasure she showed over his thought-

fulness and over new possessions. And he liked to see people admire her, as people invariably did.

They had planned on a month of vacation and then were to join Cecily's mother and stepfather in New York for a few days before going home. Cecily's mother awaited that meeting with some anxiety. In the days before the wedding she had kept close to Cecily, a little shyly, as if she wished to compress into those days a closer companionship than they had ever had before. But it was too late, perhaps, to create a feeling that grows naturally with years. They admired each other immensely, but they were not intimate.

Mrs. Warner's manner, with its unaccustomed trace of nervousness as she stood with her husband before the gates of the train yards, was not reflected in him. He was the first to catch a glimpse of Dick and Cecily and chuckled.

"There they are"—he waved boisterously—"and they don't see us; they aren't even looking at us. Like to know what we came for to break in on that—if we could break in!"

They came along the platform, absorbed in something they were discussing, and with one glance at Cecily Mrs. Warner's face lost its anxiety. Cecily walked regardless of the world. Dick must have been very good to her and very gentle to make her look like that. Then the young people saw the elder ones and hurried to them.

There was something fairly humorous in Cecily's new sophistication. She felt much older, much more learned, thoroughly admitted to the class of married women. Even her mother smiled. And her stepfather teased her.

"She swaggers when she gives her name," she said. "Did you hear her tell the clerk that the order was for Mrs. Richard Harrison? He grew pale at the august

name. You mustn't be such a snob, Cecily. Almost anybody can get married."

"Not to Dick," said Cicely, unperturbed.

"No—not without some penalty as things stand now," admitted Mr. Warner.

Such swaggers—Dick sported his complacencies too—amused the Warners and delighted them. Dick had a proprietary way of deciding when Cecily was tired and the note in his voice as he said "my wife" reflected the superiority of Cecily's "Mrs. Harrison." The older people showed their pleasure in all this by spending a great deal of money and being willing to postpone their Atlantic City trip still further. But Cecily demurred. She wanted to get back to Carrington now to take the final step that might prove to be the happiest—to begin her home.

When by night they reached Carrington she felt she was right. No one met them, for they had told no one of their coming and Dick put his wife into a taxi and gave the magic address of their home. It was ready for them, they knew, and Mrs. Warner had already installed a servant to keep it open and comfortable.

Dick threw open the door and drew his wife inside. To him it was a glorious adventure, but Cecily's face reflected more than adventure. She was very grave. Instinctively she felt that her part of things was beginning. Until now it had been Dick's game—Dick was responsible for what they did and she had been happily content to leave things in his hand—but now her share in the responsibility of marriage began.

"You look so solemn," said Dick. "It's a house, not a church, you know."

"It feels like a church. I never felt so subdued—and holy—in any church before."

"Why, Cecily, dear!" Dick did not let her maintain that tone. She was tired and he was afraid she was a

little overstrained. He made her laugh, led her on a triumphal tour of the house, gave a graphic description of himself caring for a furnace. She met his gayety with gayety, but underneath the gayety persisted that feeling of responsibility and—holiness. It was like a church, her mind kept persisting.

With the next morning came a bustle that drove those thoughts away. Cecily assumed command of her household and Dick went to his office. The telephone began to ring persistently. The maid appealed to Cecily for decisions about food and the housekeeping machinery. Cecily went about using all her new dignity to its best advantage, and repeating to herself under her breath, "This is mine—my home," with unfading wonder that it was so. She would pause to look about her in admiration, justified admiration, for the sunlight pouring into the big simple living-room, gleaming on the brasses before the fireplace, bringing out the dull colors of the upholstery, made it a very charming room. The living-room and her bedroom were the rooms she liked best, for they both caught the sunlight more than any other rooms in the house, and her bedroom was peaceful as well as beautiful, most of its color concentrated in the Chinese rug which covered the floor and set off the ivory colored furniture and walls. It was all spacious and exquisitely clean and orderly. Housekeeping instincts crowded to the front of Cecily's consciousness.

She lunched alone that day, for she and Dick had decided, Dick guiding, that it was better for him not to attempt to come home for lunch and lose two hours in the middle of the day. Cecily had agreed with him, but lunching alone, as she tried it, seemed to her a waste of time. And the hours hanging a little heavy on her hands after that first lonely luncheon, she took out the little

coupé which had been her stepfather's wedding gift to her and manufactured a shopping list.

In one of the shops she met Fliss Horton. Fliss was standing in an attitude of reflection before the blouse counter, pretending to the clerk that she was unable to decide which blouse to choose and actually wondering desperately if her father's account was too large and too long unpaid to justify the purchase of a twenty dollar blouse, reduced from forty. She was idly speculating on the practical use of the blouse and the possible occasions for wearing it when Cecily stopped beside her.

"I thought," said Fliss, "that brides didn't need to buy clothes for years and years, especially brides who have just come from New York."

"They wouldn't have to if their trousseaux were a little more practical. I have any number of afternoon clothes and pictorial blouses and traveling things with long sleeves. What I need above all and haven't is a short-sleeved smock to work in mornings."

"There again I thought all brides wore trailing negligees until noon."

They laughed together and felt very well acquainted.

"Not brides who keep house. I shall find plenty of ways to assist my maid and I need a good bare arm to do it."

Fliss, buying the twenty dollar "bargain" of chiffon, was looking enviously at Cecily, who was inspecting cotton smocks at three dollars and ninety-eight cents. Fliss didn't buy working clothes. She worked in the morning with her mother, hating it, but she and her mother wore "old things" that had to be worn out.

"Are you all settled?"

"Mother and I did that before we went away and so there was nothing to do but enter the house when we came back. You must come to see me."

"I want to."

They lingered, talking casually, and Fliss gained several advantages, being seen by half a dozen people with Cecily and finally being asked to ride home in the new coupé. She spoke to every one she knew from the window of the car and Cecily marveled openly at the number of people she knew and at the number of hats that were lifted from handsome masculine heads as Fliss smiled and nodded at them.

"You know every one," she commented.

Fliss laughed with much pleasure. "I've met a lot of people during this last year," she admitted. "If you and your husband don't scorn the Assembly and Club dances you'll see all these people there."

"Indeed we won't scorn them. I think I had cards to the Assembly once or twice last winter, but mother thought I was a bit young."

"Now that you are married you aren't too young for anything, are you?"

Cecily caught a hint of mockery in the tone and looked surprised. "Well, I shall be twenty in a few months and that's pretty old. You see I was nearly nineteen when I finished the convent."

"I'm twenty now."

"You look about seventeen."

"Because I'm small. I was in High School five years, because they cruelly flunked me one year. But High School was fun."

"Yes," said Cecily vaguely. She was watching some one in the passing crowd and suddenly with a smile she blew her horn and pulled up beside the pavement. "There's my husband," she added.

Dick came smilingly to the side of the car.

"It's exciting meeting your wife on the street," he said gayly. "I've been wondering how soon I could cut

and run for home, despite my self-respect as a business man."

"Oh, come now," begged Cecily.

She, too, found it exciting to meet her husband on the street. A delicious sense of intimacy underran all this casualness. It made her flush and the flush was becoming. Fliss looked at her, leaning forward towards her husband, with that abandon of interest and affection. It was a new way with men for Fliss. Fliss made them fight for favors and interest—mock battles, no doubt, but well staged.

Dick yielded.

"I will go home now. The house has probably gone to rack and ruin in my absence," he said, getting in beside Fliss, who had moved to the back seat. They kept up a gay banter, throwing an occasional remark at Cecily, who was driving. The slight embarrassment Fliss sometimes showed when talking to Cecily had vanished now. Fliss was sure of her ground instinctively with men. Hers were methods as old as woman and as deft—flattering, piquing, stimulating.

They dropped her at the door of the apartment house, still smiles and coquetry.

"Funny little thing, isn't she?" said Dick, climbing over to Cecily's side. "Where did you pick her up, sweetheart? She doesn't seem like your kind."

"I'm always half sorry for her and quite interested."

"Oh, she's just a little climbing gutter-pup. Smart—and pretty. She'll land a man with a million some day if she plays it right."

"She's not as bad as that, Dick, and she can't help it if she's poor and wants things."

"All right, Mrs. Charity. Be as good to her as you like. Only don't blame me if she doesn't measure up. She's been going around to dances for years with men

twice her age. She's decent enough, but sophisticated—sophisticated as you never will be."

"You sound very condemning."

"No, I didn't mean to. But I've lost my taste for chickens. I prefer—swans." And he slipped an arm around her, regardless of her driving.

The house was very lovely in the late afternoon light. The door was open, welcoming them into the softly darkened hall.

CHAPTER VII

FLISS, opening her eyes reluctantly, found them resting on a fat gray roll of dust under her bureau. It made her uncomfortable and discouraged. She closed her eyes and shifted her position in bed, but waking on the other side was just as bad. Her window curtain hung saggily in soiled folds to greet her. She hated to see such things, not that they aroused in her any ambition to remedy the particular phases of slack housekeeping and tawdry living, but they emphasized her dislike of her home and all that surrounded it. She thought it utterly unjust that she should have to live in such an environment when there were so many girls her own age awakening to pleasant, clean, beautifully furnished rooms, and her ambition was not to reform the things about her but to discard them as quickly as possible. In this revealing morning hour Fliss usually faced her problems. There was no occasion for bluff since she was alone and her background gave her no advantages. Last night at one of the club cotillions she had worn a yellow malines scarf about her head and yellow satin slippers and never for a moment lost her rôle of gayety incarnate. This morning the yellow slippers poked their toes out from under a chair, streaks on them showing only too plainly that they had been dyed and the yellow scarf lay abandoned on her bureau, its charm and crispness gone forever. Her mood matched her wrecked finery. The crispness and charm had gone out of her too.

For nearly a year and a half now she had been out of school, searching in her vague, unskilled way for a chance

to establish herself more securely and comfortably. A year and a half might not be long for a débutante, but Fliss knew that she could not take her own time. It was hard enough now to maintain her place, such as it was, without letting people tire of her. Also the time had sharpened her sense of values. She was not yet quite sure of what she wanted, but she knew most definitely what she did not want. Marriage for the sake of marriage had not the least appeal for her. She knew too much about the sordid parts of domesticity for that. There were too many girls who had a brief career of local popularity and were now wheeling baby carriages and making over last year's hats; too many young men who, unmarried, had danced and flirted their gay way through society only to become preoccupied, somewhat shabby, hard-working flat-dwellers after their marriage. Fliss had no intention of making any blunder which would land her in such an existence. She was nice to all men. That was because it was wise, lest they become malicious, and because it kept her in practice. But she was more chary with her kisses than she had been in High School and she had learned many new ways of getting without giving.

She had learned too how to take snubs with considerable grace; not humbling herself too much, but rather ignoring them, pretending not to see what for the sake of her scrap of dignity she could not afford to see. But she did see. It was one thing to be a popular girl in High School, to hold the record for the number of invitations to dances, to be the best dancer and the most sought after girl—and another to be left when the school circles broke up and resolved into the social groups to which their families belonged, to be a girl without family backing or a college education, who was determined not to be "dropped." There were many parents who had

found Fliss an attractive little girl, but now saw no reason to include her in their parties for their daughters. Their daughters were young women with futures to be planned for, who must take their places in the community, and Fliss was a social anomaly, pretty but nondescript. People were less cruel, of course, than forgetful. Fliss "didn't occur to them." They were full of interests in which she could not share for lack of money, for lack of direction and chaperonage.

Working, as an alternative to marriage, was quite as distasteful to Fliss. She felt that working, especially at the things she could do, would put her definitely in the wrong class and out of the reach of the people to whom she pinned her ambitions. She preferred to be classless rather than to be in the wrong class. To her idleness her parents did not really object. Mr. Horton had little enough to give his wife and daughter, but he expected to give them what he had and to live in shabbiness and self-denial himself. He had suggested once that Fliss learn stenography, but at her scornful protest had dropped the matter, assuming that he did not, as Fliss said, "understand." The suggestion had been made merely because he felt that Fliss must have time heavy on her hands, and not that he had any theory about her being a wage earner. Like millions of men of all grades of strength and success, he expected to be eternally liable for the women he accumulated in his family, and to be subject to them. Mrs. Horton had educated him in domestic life. He took it mildly as a blend of disorderly bedroom, where his possessions were crowded into the smallest possible space by an array of unattractive feminine things over which inevitably hung the smell of face powder, thick and sweet, a dining room in which food and service were inferior to his quick lunch place and a living-room in which he might sit unmolested, unless Fliss

or his wife wanted him out of it, which often happened. When they did, he went to the moving picture house on the corner and saw the program through twice.

It was hard for Fliss to find the slightest interest in her parents. She might have been thrown with them casually, instead of sharing one of the closest of ties. Perhaps it was equally hard on the parents to be even semi-responsible—responsible as far as she wished to allow—for a bit of cold, hard brilliance like Fliss, whom their easy-going philosophy could never hope to comprehend. Mr. Horton would have been satisfied with the most commonplace of sons-in-law and Mrs. Horton delighted merely to have Fliss attain the vague dignity of marriage. How was it possible for them to imagine the scheming and plotting, the steps and retreats which filled the mind of their daughter? She did not bother to tell them about her status with different men—even when the men asked her to marry them. She had had three proposals in this year and a half. One was from a handsome young man who worked in a broker's office in the daytime and danced and flirted in the evenings with as much abandon as did Fliss. She gave little thought to his offer. The frivolity which had stood him in such good stead as a companion on many an evening was absolutely against him as a candidate for husbandhood. And added to this was the fact that he was an unknown young man who came from another city, presumably from obscurity, and without money.

The second offer was a curious one, made half in jest and half in earnest by one of the city's wealthiest and most dissipated young men. He was a young man whom Fliss might have handled to advantage had she taken his laughing proposal seriously, but she did not choose to take it so. She merely laughed at him, shrewdly gauging behind her mirth the difficulty of living with dissipation

even if it were guarded by wealth. Fliss was in pursuit of solidity. That she might have found in some measure in the repeated boyish offers of Gordon, her High School companion. Gordon's position was unassailable and in each college vacation he followed Fliss about with a devotion which was unremitting and should have been touching to her. He wanted to leave college and marry her—wanted to run away with her—but she held him off too, not quite so definitely as the others. There was a good chance that Gordon would always be useful to her. But he was very young and entirely dependent on his parents.

What Fliss was anxious for now was some definite opportunity to present itself. She was vaguely conscious that her technique was fairly perfect, but that she must have something to work on soon. The roll of dust, more obnoxious every morning, the torn window curtain, the dyed slippers, and, most of all, the sound of her mother's voice in the other room, engaged in some interminable conversation over the telephone, filled her with an almost unbearable desire to do something about her situation soon.

The voice ceased, the receiver clicked and she heard her mother's footsteps turned towards her room.

"Not up yet, Flissy?" Her mother came in a little apologetically. "I suppose you are tired after last night. I heard you come in and then the cuckoo struck two. That's pretty late."

"I can't very well come home by myself, can I? I've got to stay until things are over whether I like it or not. There's no limousine waiting my orders every night."

Her mother did not take up the point. She moved heavily about the room, picking up the strewn finery of the night before, settling things into a kind of order.

"Would you like a cup of coffee in bed? I can heat it up in a minute."

Fliss yawned. "No, I'll get up. I'd sooner eat anywhere than in this room. I should think father could make that landlord decorate these rooms. They're like a slum."

"They won't do a thing for you. Rents are terrible and they just tell you to take them or leave them. Mrs. Nesbit is looking for a flat and she said——"

"I can repeat what she said without hearing it," interrupted Fliss, not without a glint of humor. "Come have some coffee with me, mother." She had an occasional lazy affection for her mother when she was not too much irritated by her. Also she was company when there was no one else.

Mrs. Horton poured the coffee and set it on the edge of the near-mahogany dining table, while Fliss hung languidly over the gas stove making toast. She was an untidy little figure now—negligee trailing, hair straggling, but her eyes, deep and soft from sleep, made up for the rest of her unattractiveness. They sat down and emptied the coffee-pot, cup after cup, a kind of lazy planlessness about them which was characteristic of their usual mornings. But Mrs. Horton roused herself into attempted action sooner than she usually did.

"I suppose you've forgotten, haven't you, that the bridge club meets here to-day, Fliss?"

"Lord, mother, not those terrible women again!"

"Don't talk so, Fliss. They're all nice women. Just as good as we are."

"Well, I shan't be here."

"Now, please, Fliss. You know how they talk. If you aren't here they'll think it's awfully funny. I don't care about your being here all the time, but to help

with the refreshments anyway. There's no one who can serve them as you do."

"You know how I hate that crowd. Sitting around retailing gossip about women who wouldn't know them on the street. Backstairs stuff! Oh, why don't you drop them?"

"Now, you mustn't be so snobby, Fliss. I've known these women for years. Mrs. Ellis——"

"Don't tell me again that Mrs. Ellis assisted at my birth. Maybe that's one thing that's wrong with me."

"You'll stay in and help me, won't you, dear?"

"Washing dishes all afternoon?"

"No, you won't have to do that sort of thing. I've called up Ellen and she will come in at three to help. She's working now but she asked for an afternoon off."

"Ellen," echoed Fliss with deeper gloom.

"Ellen's a nice girl," said her mother with an unusually defensive note.

"Of course she's nice. She's a lot nicer than the members of your club. But it is tough to have a cousin who's a servant."

"What else can the poor girl do? She has to earn her living and she can't choose. She gets much better money than she would clerking."

"I suppose."

Ellen was a sore point. She was a cousin of Mrs. Horton's who had been brought up on her father's farm and been a person of some consequence in the farming district. Her father had died and Ellen had sold the farm, finding it heavily weighted with mortgages, and come to the city to work. She knew how to do housework and housework suited her, so she went into service quite simply and without feeling herself depreciated in the least. The aggressiveness of the city servant had been left out of her, and while she did not feel herself at

all the equal in position of the ladies she worked for, she had no feeling of common interest with the city servant class, so slavishly imitating their mistresses, so insolent of manner and cheap of ideal. Ellen chose her employers with discretion, and always managed to pick ladies. She treated them not as if they were above her, but merely as if they were engaged on a different sort of job, social as well as economic, and in so doing solved the servant problem in her own small way. But she was an unavoidable cause of suffering to Fliss. Every time she came to see the Hortons—and they could not help being glad to see her, for she brought not only presents to Fliss, but an atmosphere of comfort and devotion into that chaotic apartment—she was a torturing reminder to Fliss that her own social position was founded on nothing and that she ate at the table with a person who served at the tables at which she wished to sit. But she somehow did not say anything to Ellen about the way she felt. There was a quiet dignity about the farm girl as well as a generosity that kept Fliss's complainings in check.

Another thing was that Ellen always had ready money. She was extremely well paid, spent very little on herself and was always ready to finance some small extravagance for Fliss. The Hortons never had enough ready money and it was a satisfaction to Fliss to possess a blouse or an expensive pair of gloves which were really paid for before she wore them. There was physical comfort, even if mental rancor, in being a cousin of Ellen's.

Mrs. Horton was bringing out that very point now. "Ellen said she'd stop at Scott's and get some cream cheese and we can have brown bread sandwiches with the salad and coffee. And she said if she bought a lobster there would be lots of time to cook that after she got here. She works so fast and they are sure to play until

five, anyway. Coffee, salad, brown bread sandwiches and cake, and your father can just piece on what's left over, when he comes home."

The telephone interrupted them. Fliss answered it in the omnipresent hope of something interesting, and it seemed to galvanize her drooping spirits. As if it were necessary to touch up her appearance in order to get her spirits into action, at the first words she heard she twisted back her hair and drew her negligee around her with her free hand. Her face, so listless a moment before, began to sparkle—to live again—and her voice changed from its discouraged tone into one which fairly sang with interest and desire to please and to coquet.

"Of course you didn't get me out of bed—no, not tired at all, thought it was fun—I'm glad you liked to dance with me—so do I—I'd love to. What do you suggest?—The music there is good, but the food really too terrible—why I think so, who else is going?—to-morrow night, then, about eight-thirty—yes, you can find it easily enough if you can read numbers. We're flat dwellers, you know—cliff dwellers, you might say—208 Gladstone Street, Flat H. That's three flights up—if you groan I'll meet you with a glass of water—all right—good-by."

Smiling still, clinging to the atmosphere of jocularity, Fliss hung up the receiver. Her mother watched her without questioning. It was curious that there was not any of the eager curiosity in her face which animates most women in contemplation of their daughter's flirtations. Mrs. Horton had been well trained to keep out of things. Perhaps she felt that even her daughter's successful marriage would mean nothing to her. She would be organized and managed through the proper things to do, but there would be no confidence, no dependence. So she waited for Fliss to speak.

Fliss did, though more in reflection than as if anxious

to produce any effect on her listener. "Funny—I didn't know he was at all taken with me. I only met him last night. Mother, I've simply got to have that red georgette mended before to-morrow night. I haven't a rag to wear and maybe if that were fixed up a little—it isn't dressy at the Palladium and with my black hat I could make the georgette do."

"Maybe Ellen can do it for you to-night before she goes."

"I'll ask her. The sleeves ought to be shorter too, you know. Maybe she could cut them and I'll help her with the sandwiches if she does and wipe the dishes for her."

They seemed to forget that Ellen's labors at Mrs. Horton's party were given as favors. Mrs. Horton's face had brightened at her daughter's new tone of co-operation. She even ventured a question and was answered without rebuff.

"Who was it, Flissy?"

"Why, it was Matthew Allenby. You wouldn't know, mother, but he is the hardest man in town to get to notice you. He's not a boy, you know. The man must be nearly forty and a bachelor. I'd never met him till last night; Owen introduced him and we had three dances. He dances horribly and is perfectly crazy about it. He's a mining man—scads of money—and lives alone somewhere. Wouldn't it be wonderful if——"

She was really rather pathetic and almost sweet as she fell into her dream, mercenary as it was, for she wanted only things of beauty and she had no cruelty developed in her yet—no deliberate cruelty; unconscious disregard of other people perhaps was the worst of her. She sat dreaming her dream of advancement as most girls of her age dream of love and she did love the things of which she dreamt.

"Come, Fliss, please dress. It's getting on towards noon and I want to clear this room out."

Fliss went her way to her room and thence to the little bathroom, where she lay in the tub, from which the enamel was peeling, and wondered just how she would handle Matthew Allenby. Then she dressed for the bridge party, for it was after noon and she knew that her mother's guests arrived early and stayed late. Her oldest afternoon dress served for them, but with her black fringe of hair setting off the softness and whiteness of her skin, she was so pretty even in her old dress that her mother, bustling into corsets in the next room—she and Fliss always omitted lunch if possible—looked at her with an expression of pride. It meant a good deal to show off Fliss to her friends. She had so little chance.

"But don't expect me to fill in at a bridge table if any of the old prize-hunting harpies don't come, because I won't. I'm going to talk to Ellen and plan the best way to fix over my georgette. By the way, where is Ellen working, now that the Grangers have gone to California?"

Her mother did not know. She knew that Ellen had just taken a new place.

Ellen arrived a little later. She came in heavily burdened with brown packages and bags, having added to the cream cheese and lobster an extra fresh head of lettuce and a small steak for Mr. Horton, so that he wouldn't "have to eat all that sweet stuff that men hate." That was like Ellen and they were rare days for Mr. Horton when she came. Broiled steak for him, who was used to a thin sirloin, pounded and fried. Ellen deposited her packages on the kitchen table and looked with admiration at her young cousin.

"My, but that's a pretty dress, Fliss."

"This old thing? Just fit for the ragbag."

Ellen herself was not a person to be ashamed of as far as appearance went. She had no variety in her clothes, but her neat dark blue suit was well-pressed and well-fitted (by Ellen herself). She was quite tall and pleasant-faced, her complexion a trifle steamed into floridness by much cooking, but her hands were as soft and well-kept as those of Fliss. Ellen had her few prides, and her hands were one of them. Seen on the street she looked like a pleasant, middle-class young matron. In markets and shops where she was not known she was invariably called "Mrs.," the obvious domestic capability in her manner bringing forth that title. The tradespeople always liked to deal with her. She knew what to buy and permitted no extortions or frauds, but she was friendly and uncomplaining and businesslike.

Going about the kitchen of the flat she made a new place of it. It became a hospitable place, a pleasant workshop, with the lobster unwrapped and lying on a platter, the mayonnaise quickly beaten to yellow smoothness, the sandwiches beginning to pile up on two plates and Ellen herself bustling about, but lending an ear of interest to the tale of the red georgette.

"What you want to do with those sleeves, Fliss, is to slit them and then hemstitch them around the corners. I'll turn them up this evening, slit them and to-morrow all you'll have to do is to take them into the hemstitching shop down on Third Street and they'll finish it for you. They won't charge more than a quarter for that, though if I were you I'd rip off the lace yoke and we'll turn that in and run a couple of lines of hemstitching around there and then, with that little organdy collar you wear on your velveteen, it'll look like a new dress."

Fliss beamed. She knew that it would look like a new dress. She sat on the edge of the shelf, swinging her feet and really admiring Ellen. She liked Ellen's lack

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of pose too, just as she liked the lack of pose in Cecily. It was so glorious not to have to pose or pretend. Meanwhile the little girl in her, the really often undernourished girl, was vastly enjoying the sandwiches which Ellen pressed upon her now and then.

"Where are you now, Ellen?"

"Nicest place I've ever been. I didn't mean to take any more general work—just cooking—but I was asked specially to go to this place by Mrs. Granger and I like it. Just a bride and groom. Such a nice young couple and she is lovely to me. Helps me with the work wherever she can and so considerate."

"What's her name?"

"Mrs. Richard Harrison. Do you know her?"

Fliss had a funny little sinking feeling. "Yes—a little—oh, yes."

"I thought you would probably. She's very young—not more than your age I should say. Now, Fliss," she caught a fleeting look on her cousin's face, "I'll not do anything that is going to make you feel bad."

"Oh, Ellen, I don't mean——"

"I know, Fliss—you don't want to hurt me. You can't help feeling a little though that you don't like to have me work for your friends, me being your cousin and all, but you needn't fuss. No one is going to know I'm your cousin unless you tell them. I decided that long ago."

Ellen had never been so frank or so expansive and Fliss felt a little ashamed, but somehow vastly relieved. She shifted the blame for her snobbery.

"People are such fools, Ellen."

"I know."

With her fears laid to rest, Fliss began to get a glimpse of a silver lining. It wouldn't be so bad to have Ellen at Cecily's. She could get information about what

Cecily liked, whom she entertained, and learn how to strengthen her friendship with Cecily.

"She must have lovely things," she began.

"It's a beautiful house and the best of everything in it. And how Mrs. Harrison does love it! She takes good care of things too, and she won't let you be extravagant, not that I'd want to. She was brought up in a convent, you know, and she's neat as wax."

This to Fliss was irrelevant.

"Is she crazy about her husband?"

But there she blundered. A reticence came over Ellen's whole manner. Admitted though she might be to the sight of her employer's feelings, it was not in Ellen to gossip about them. She was willing to tell Fliss about the pattern of Cecily's silver and the drawn-work in her lunch cloths, but what she saw of Cecily's emotions was revealed to her in a kind of unconscious confidence and Ellen was incapable of betraying it.

"Of course," she said shortly, and there was no way of expanding the point. For the second time Fliss felt a little ashamed. She took another sandwich and was silent.

Mrs. Horton's guests began to arrive and Fliss had to greet them before they took their places at the four bridge tables crowded together in the living-room. They were middle-aged ladies in silk dresses, who took their hats off in Mrs. Horton's bedroom, used her face powder profusely and then settled down to a game of bridge which was surprisingly cut-throat. On the mantel two packages wrapped in tissue paper stimulated them immensely. Not that the prize—possibly a brass-plated candlestick or a pair of stockings—(silk to the knee)—was of any great value, but the idea of getting something for nothing enthralled them. Their faces grew shrewd and their glances at their opponents inimical; and the table

bell which rang now and then as the signal to move from one table to the next was also the signal for a burst of discussion, commiseration and congratulation. Fliss knew them all. Most of them belonged to the district in town holding the brown house whence she had persuaded her parents to move, and she had no good word for them. They were good ladies, addicted to boudoir caps in the morning, who liked to gossip and did it generously. But they were kindly enough, good to their families and on the whole unambitious and satisfied. And for this last quality it was hardest for Fliss to tolerate them. They were so settled; they did not recognize Fliss as a person of ambition, calling her Flissy and speaking about her age, her hair, her dress; comparing her to Clara or Jessie whom Fliss had known in grammar school and who now were stenographers or department store clerks. If they had stood a little in awe of Fliss she would have been much more kindly. But to them she was just "pretty little Flissy Horton" and she knew it.

Her limited cordiality having no effect at all on the matronly conversation, she fled again to the kitchen and took refuge with Ellen, who was already busy with the red georgette dress. Fliss put it on to demonstrate its lacks and possibilities and became, with the donning of it, a curiously unsuitable figure to mix with pots and pans, melted butter and lobster. Fliss was decorative and stimulating enough to be out of place in the midst of mere utilities.

"My, how I hate that gang in there," she said.

Ellen continued cutting deftly. "Why?"

"They're so awfully cheap."

"How do you mean? Clothes?"

"Clothes, of course, but I could stand that if they weren't so cheap in their ideas—if they had some ambition—if they weren't so ghastly self-satisfied. Look

at them in there, playing cards all the blessed afternoon for a silly, ugly painted plate."

Fliss knew what was inside the tissue paper packages on the mantel.

"Most women play cards. All the women you admire so much have bridge-luncheons."

"I know, but they play for something worth while; give the proceeds to charities."

"I've seen them playing for money that they couldn't afford to lose," answered Ellen.

"Well—even that. My goodness, it's better to play for money—have real stakes—than to get all worked up and hot and cross over silly cake plates. Oh, I don't know—the other women are so different, anyway, so much more alive. This is sort of sordid."

"Um——," said Ellen noncommittally.

"If I thought," went on Fliss, "that I would settle down and get like those old harpies, I'd—well, I'd just want to die now," finished Fliss, with drama.

Ellen did not seem impressed.

"People are different, Fliss," she said gravely. "They're nice women—these friends of your ma's—even if they don't seem very genteel. And it's been my experience that it's best to take folks as you find them."

"I don't want to take folks like this—at all. I just want to get away from them."

"So you do; but your ma likes them. They're the people she knows best and some of them have been awfully good to her. She was telling me how Mrs. Ellis——"

"I know, Ellen. She probably enjoyed it, too. All those women think about is babies and who's going to have one next."

Ellen flushed a little. "That's awful talk, Fliss."

"Awful! It's all you hear. Honestly, I don't know

who's worst—the women in there or the girls I know. If you get shocked at a little thing like that, you ought to hear the way the girls talk. Marjorie Foster—she's Marjorie Grant now—who was married last month had all the girls in to tea the other day. And you should hear them talk! All about their husbands—and babies—and such."

The flush on Ellen's face had risen to her very eyebrows.

"Well, you needn't talk it to me, Fliss. I think it's disgusting. I may be country and all that, but I know what's decent and I don't think girls who talk like that are."

Fliss let it drop. She wondered what Ellen would have said if she could have heard her airing her views at Marjorie Grant's tea on the way she meant to run marriage.

The crowning event of the afternoon approached—the presentation of the prize—to be followed quickly, as if to forestall the disappointment of the losers, by the "refreshments." Fliss watched the lady with the highest score receive the tissue paper package with anticipatory smiles and giggling, untie the ribbon and hold the painted plate up for the group to see. There was great admiration, a general close inspection. The booby prize, a box of chocolates, was given and received with even more merriment and the ladies settled back, ready for Fliss to proceed with a folded napkin for each capacious lap. Fliss dropped them with a careless little air of detachment that did not quite pretend to hauteur, but approached it. She did not want to talk to them; serve them if she must, but preserve her aloofness at all costs. But even that was not left to her. It was the same Mrs. Ellis, no doubt with a kind of proprietary interest in this slim, silk-clad girl, whom she had first seen as a red little baby emerging

into the world under difficulties, who insisted on detaining her for an intimate bit of conversation.

"You're getting to be quite a swell, aren't you, Fliss? I see your name in the papers all the time—running around to dances and all kinds of didoes with real society folks. Must cost a lot to keep that up. How does pa like footing the bills?"

Fliss flushed an angry red and stood, biting her lip. She had to stand still because Mrs. Ellis had a friendly hold on her dress.

"Got your eye on some swell fellow, too, Flissy? No one's going to be too good for that girl I always said when you were growing up. I knew you'd fly high."

"Please, Mrs. Ellis." Fliss detached her dress and marched away, but Mrs. Ellis only laughed.

"Guess I was treading on somebody's toes then," she said to Mrs. Horton. "Fliss always was touchy. Has she really got her eye on somebody?"

Her own eye on the kitchen door, Mrs. Horton answered with caution. "Oh, Fliss has lots of beaux. Always has had, since she was a little thing, you know."

They turned the talk to the excellence of the salad dressing. But when the cakes came in, Fliss did not reappear. It was Ellen who passed them. "I won't go in there again!" Fliss had declared. "Not for anything on earth. No, I won't, Ellen, I couldn't stand it."

She was on the point of tears and Ellen's quick sympathy saw how overwrought she was. So she passed the cakes herself. Fliss was grateful enough to wipe the dishes, and as she and Ellen worked they heard the voices of the departing guests raised in high cordiality to their hostess and the door shutting on one after another.

Mrs. Horton came out, her face beaming. "Your salad was elegant, Ellen, and they had a real nice time, though I must say I was surprised at Mrs. Hyland's getting the

prize because she doesn't play a very good game. However, she said a cake plate was the thing of all things she wanted. Where'd you go to, Fliss?"

"I couldn't stand that old Mrs. Ellis."

But Mrs. Horton was on the high tide of her big day and Fliss did not greatly disturb her. "Oh, she meant all right. You mustn't mind what old friends say. Well, here's your father."

Mr. Horton came slowly into the kitchen and smiled at Ellen.

"Quite a party, eh?"

"And your supper will be late," said Ellen, "but it won't be long now."

It was equally surprising to the three Hortons to have supper at all, but Ellen cleared her kitchen of them—Mrs. Horton to change her garb, Fliss to finish the red dress and Mr. Horton to read his paper while she prepared the meal. Half an hour later they all sat down to supper as if there had been no party—no left-over sandwiches, but hot rolls and meat and coffee. It was curious to see how they all reacted to it, and as they became better fed became also more definite personalities. Mrs. Horton insisted on doing the fresh batch of dishes, her husband became actually talkative on the subject of the railroad strike, even though no one listened, and the sharp edge of Fliss's manner softened perceptibly.

Ellen did not notice or reflect on what she had done. It was all of a normal day's work for her. But she kissed Fliss as she left and there was a trace of pity in her eyes. Going back through the city, she stopped at the gay windows to look at clothes displayed there that were pretty like Fliss herself—gay like Fliss. As she looked, she sighed. But when she approached the house of her employer her face took on a look of satisfaction. There were lights in the living-room. Mr. and Mrs.

Harrison were back from their theater party, and as she went past the long windows Ellen saw them—Cecily curled up in a big chair, her evening coat thrown back, and Dick sitting on the arm of the chair fondling his wife's hair. It was a pretty picture—and pleasantly real. Ellen wound her alarm clock and set her bread with great satisfaction. She loved the convenient, pretty kitchen. As she mounted the back stairs quietly, the lights in the living-room still burned.

"Did you have an awfully good time to-night?" Cecily was asking.

"Didn't you?"

"Yes, except I'm always glad to get home. It doesn't seem as if we had much chance to be home these days."

"No—three nights this week—and to-morrow night, I meant to tell you. I told Mollie Heathcote that I was sure we could join them at the Palladium."

"Dick, why on earth? I was going to have the most heavenly evening here."

Dick looked perplexed. "Why, she wanted us and I knew we didn't have anything on and it didn't occur to me to say no."

Cecily sighed.

"The Palladium is rather fun, sometimes," suggested Dick.

"I suppose it is, but—well, any place is fun where we can be together."

"Of course, dear. I'll call Mollie up, though, if you like and tell her I forgot that we were to be busy."

"No, don't do that. Mollie's a dear and I wouldn't like to play a trick on her. We'll go."

"You know we won't be going about like this all our married life. Just now we're a novelty as a couple, but we'll get to the slippered stage. Especially——"

"Especially," agreed Cecily, with a tender little laugh.

"And now," said Dick, jumping off the chair, "as the good Lady Macbeth said—to bed! And may the good days of domesticity thicken around us, shutting out all ribald pleasure!"

CHAPTER VIII

SO it was, through the curious little twirl of circumstance which took Fliss, elated, and Cecily, reluctant, to the Palladium Hotel on the same night, that Matthew Allenby met Cecily. He saw her across the room at first. The Palladium was one of those public places to which people went to get rid of the ennui caused by their own circle of friends, but they were always careful to surround themselves with enough of their friends to put their attendance in the proper light. The fact that you were at the Palladium had no significance. The point was—with whom were you at the Palladium?

Fliss was delightfully conscious of the "rightness" of her companions. Matthew Allenby and the young Frederick Craigs were an effective trio and Fliss was radiant in the red georgette. Allenby watched her with enjoyment. He liked vivid things, alive things, and possibly it was to that fever for life in Fliss that her invitation to-night was due. She tried to teach him to dance, scolding him for his awkwardness in her impudent way and he seemed to like that too.

They were seating themselves after a dance when he followed Fliss's gay little nod with his eyes and saw Cecily. She had not been dancing, but her head was lifted to smile at Dick and Mollie, coming back breathless.

"Who is that girl?" asked Matthew.

"What girl?"

"The one over there smiling at Dick Harrison."

The Craigs and Fliss laughed together. "Why, that's his wife!"

"Of course," said Matthew. "I'd forgotten he was married. He did it up in haste and I was East all last spring. Her name was Moore, wasn't it?"

"Good-looking, isn't she?"

"Very."

He looked again at Cecily. "Funny—I haven't seen a girl who looked like that in a long while."

"How do you mean?"

"Dick Harrison is a lucky wretch, as usual."

"He's been vamped," said Fliss. "Come over and I'll introduce you to her." It was one of those openings which Fliss could never resist.

"Here's a man who has been begging to meet you," she said a moment later to Cecily. She might have said more, but she was not quite free with Cecily yet.

Cecily gave Matthew her hand and the shadow of the smile that she had given Dick. Then, as the music began and Fliss and Dick danced away, the Heathcotes followed suit.

"I'd ask you to dance," apologized Matthew, "but I'm rotten at it."

"I'm tired of it, anyway. I was just wondering if I was getting middle-aged."

"Only in the first stages, I should judge."

"Don't laugh at me."

"I assure you I won't. I was looking at you from the other side of the room and thinking that it was strange that I didn't want to laugh. Most girls do affect me that way. Do you mind if I ask you something? Are you an ardent anything?"

Cecily looked bewildered.

"I mean feminist, sociologist, politician—have you a heavy purpose?"

"Dick," said Cecily definitely.

"There you are. I knew it. I hadn't seen a girl look at a man in years as you looked at Dick. Men aren't the heavy interests of women any more."

"Nonsense. It seems to me girls aren't interested in anything else."

"You don't understand me. I used the wrong word anyhow. Girls are interested enough in men, but not singly in a man. That's what I mean. You don't see that 'till death do us part' look around on girls' faces."

"Are you just being silly?"

"Probably," Matthew grinned, "but I expressed myself anyway. It did me good. I feel that I have made a real contribution to thought."

Cecily looked at him. He was older than Dick, she thought, probably approaching forty, though his face might be older than his age warranted. It had lines set on a skin that was hardly ready for them. It might have been a discouraged face, or a sad face, but the eyes kept it from being that. They were too interested, too alert for sadness or despondency. She liked the smile in his gray eyes. She liked his strong, alert figure. It lacked Dick's lean athleticism and he was heavy about the shoulders as a man near forty might be, but he had the appearance of power. "Have you been amusing Fliss Horton with contributions to thought?"

"No. I have merely stepped on her feet. But I like to look at her. She's so immensely vigorous and vigor in frail things is always inspiring, isn't it?"

"I wonder if that's what I feel about her."

"Maybe. Watch her now. Watch her amusing your husband. She's working at it hard."

"He is amused," said Cecily. "I can tell by the way his eyes slant down at her. He likes her."

"That must be," said Matthew, reflectively, "just the

way she was working on me the other night. I had the most insistent desire to be amused again, so I got up this party."

"You're hardly gracious."

He was suddenly different. "I didn't mean to be rude, Mrs. Harrison. I was only thinking aloud. You mustn't think I don't feel immensely obliged to Miss Horton—awfully grateful to her for being willing to put up with me for an evening."

"Of course," said Cecily, "I didn't think you were rude."

"Do you know that I used to be quite a friend of your husband?"

"Used to be? I remember writing your name on an invitation to our reception."

"Only I was out of town and missed it. Don't you think that, because I did miss it, I'm entitled to see more of you now, to make up for what I lost?"

Dick, coming back to the table again, bore him out. "I remember telling Cecily that I was going to bring you to see her when you got back to town. He's a great fellow, Cecily. One of our leading politicians—one of these amateur European generals! Never lets it interfere with business though, do you, Matt?"

Fliss and Matthew wandered back to their own table and Matthew, devoting himself to Fliss, apparently forgot the sudden interest he had taken in Cecily. He gave all his attention to Fliss, took her home, flattered her, laughed with her—gave Fliss the tingle of a thoroughly successful evening. Then he wandered home and read a book on French politics until he was half asleep. The European political situation was absorbing him these days since the war had begun. His rooms were full of war stuff, both English and French; "Land and Water,"

full of Hilaire Belloc's guarded prophecies, dozens of pamphlets, maps.

It was characteristic of him that he could read French—not in translation, not with the help of a dictionary, but fluently, with enjoyment and understanding. He could read it because he had wanted to so much and he understood the technique of wanting things until they became realized desires. He had wanted knowledge, success and friends and he had these things now in spite of an education cut cruelly short when he was sixteen, in spite of lack of money and of having been born in the obscurity of a little village. Through poverty and opposition he had quietly pushed his way and established himself. Carrington did not question him. He had been a successful young man when he came there. He had come to look after mining interests near Carrington and smaller interests in the city. Now he was wealthy and useful to the city in a hundred ways. They wanted him in politics and he gave some of the time which he might have had for leisure to that. But he would not let political interests absorb him. He advised, did some speaking, lent his influence where it seemed fit and let it go at that.

He had apparently never yet needed women or he would have managed to get the one he wanted, if he had followed the simple processes of his philosophy. Or perhaps he found his companionship with women in the books he read. On his laden, well-used bookshelves there were so many stories, poems, thoughts of beautiful women and noble women. Little contemporary fiction—it was the library of a man who had guided himself through literature, full of books which were cross references to each other, books which showed how his mind, setting out to pursue some line of thought, had gone off at a tangent on some philosophical quest. He needed no

order or cataloguing of all his books; he could always put his hand on the one he wanted.

The rooms in which he lived were on the second floor of an old house which had been turned into an apartment building. There was an old-fashioned alcove in his living-room, and the circular walls were lined with books except where a long window cut into the structure of shelves. The rest of the living-room was furnished with a taste and skill which hit just the right note of spaciousness without seeming bare—a few easy-chairs, a dark red Turkish rug and a black oak table. It was on this table that he ate his meals, prepared for him by the Swedish woman who cooked and cleaned for him. There was a bedroom which was furnished almost with ascetic plainness, and that was all except for the kitchen and the room occupied by the cook. It was not an elaborate establishment for as wealthy a man as Matthew Allenby, but he had lived there in complete satisfaction for five years.

A week after the encounter at the Palladium he called on the Harrisons and found them at home. They were pleasant enough in their welcome and before half an hour he had justified himself for breaking in on one of their deliberately domestic evenings. He knew how to be entertaining, how to talk business with Dick in such a way that Cecily was not excluded from the conversation, how to make the conversation broaden itself into interesting fields outside of the specific ones in which the talk might begin. Dick enjoyed himself hugely. He had always liked Matthew Allenby and had various plans for business deals with him. Matthew was some years older and had drifted into the companionship of older men than Dick.

They talked war for the most part, as people did in 1915—with abstract enthusiasm, impersonal analysis.

Then Cecily played for them. She played well, without brilliance, but with an accuracy and feeling for melody that the convent was directly responsible for. It was less her playing than the fact of her playing, the picture she made at the piano, singing and playing softly in the light of the tall candles which framed her, that was charming. The men watched her silently from across the room.

"I don't want in the least to go home," said Matthew, as Cecily turned to them finally. "I could sit here for days and days sipping this very remarkable liqueur that your husband is offering up and watching a very perfect picture of what homes may be—and rarely are outside of the Victrola advertisements."

"Haven't you a home, Mr. Allenby?"

"Two of them. One is a little frame house in Indiana where my mother lives and where she insists she will always live. It is a very small house, atrociously furnished and heated by a Franklin stove and a coal range, but she likes it. That's my home—maternal home, homestead—the place where I don't have to knock or ring a bell, you know. The other home is on the second floor of the big green house at River Street and Fourth Avenue. It is a pleasant place, a very pleasant place, but it lacks life in a way. All bachelor places do. Bachelor places are safe, but they never quite touch the high spots. A bachelor never lives a very rich life and his home reflects that."

"But you think bachelor places are safer?" asked Dick smiling.

"It's always safer to be alone than to risk close companionship, isn't it?"

"I know what you mean," said Cecily. "I never could see why homes were considered dull places. People in relations to each other always seem wonderful to me. My mother's home was always exciting to me. There

were my mother with my two stepbrothers—who worship her just as I do—and mother and I and mother and father—all of us reacting on each other. Then when I began to keep my own home I found it even more interesting. I am completely responsible for everything that happens in the house; that's quite a lot of excitement."

"Of course you're new at it," said Dick. "In time habit may wear off the edge of looking after my meals and my comfort."

"No, I will not let the edge wear off!"

"You won't," said Matthew. "Life will deepen for you."

It was odd that, though Cecily was looking at her husband, Matthew was reassuring her. Dick laughed a little. He thought the conversation somewhat obscure and over-personal and poured Matthew another tiny glass of cordial.

"Well, I've nothing to say for bachelor living. Here's to charming wives, Allenby, and may you find one soon. Cecily will help you."

They met again within a week. Cecily was walking home from the convent one afternoon, where she sometimes stopped to see Mother Fénelon, and she met Matthew at his very doorstep. Cecily felt curiously well-acquainted with him and was glad when he asked to walk with her. She told him about the convent and how much she liked to stop there for a few minutes to feel again the atmosphere of the cloister.

"And then you go away with your appetite for home whetted?"

"Not because the convent is less attractive than a home in its own way, but they set each other off so stunningly."

He laughed in great amusement.

"You have a way of making me most confidential,"

said Cecily. They had reached the brick walk leading up to her house. "I'd ask you in, but it's too near dinner time. Some day you must come to dinner with us."

"Any day." He went briskly down the street and Cecily forgot him. She was not feeling quite so gay as she had sounded or tried to sound. Strange things seemed to be happening to her. She had recently gone to her stepfather's house and spent an afternoon in his library looking up important medical words and finding little information. She supposed the things that were happening meant that she was going to have a baby and she was frightened. So she could not tell Dick. She felt terribly ashamed of her own fears. They had talked about it and it had seemed very beautiful and fine in talking. Now when it had to be done—done by her, through her, with these strange processes diagrammed in encyclopedias—it was different. It was very different. It seemed to cut her off from Dick instead of bringing her closer—it absorbed her thoughts. And with the fears went this strange weakness and dizziness, so foreign to her. That was why she had gone to the convent. And there the little white chapel had seemed to ring with the words of the Jesuit priest in his last instruction, "the sacrament which has for its purpose the bringing up of children." Cecily's whole soul seemed to rebel. Marriage was not that. Marriage was Dick—Dick to play with, talk with—Dick to make a home for—Dick to love. This other business was not Dick. The chapel helped her not at all.

Mother Fénelon, meeting her as she had done before, had helped. She had stopped and kissed Cecily swiftly on each cheek and asked about Dick and her mother. Mother Fénelon had a way of reconciling the worldly and the divine. Then she looked at Cecily very steadily and asked, "Still afraid, Cecily?"

"A little, Mother."

"That will pass, my dear. Experience will help you—and prayer to our Blessed Lady."

That was all, but somehow Cecily felt that the nun understood the whole business and that she was right. She went out into the afternoon toned up a little.

CHAPTER IX

THE word love must not be narrowed or we shall lose the key to many a chamber of life. In our cross-section of life, which shows itself the most beautiful love? The love of Matthew which spends itself in pleasure in Cecily's existence rather than in personal desire, the tornado which must storm the frail soul of Fliss, the rare devotion of Ellen, the servant, for her mistress, the fine normality of Dick's feeling for his wife, or the love of Cecily herself, tormented and abused as such free-given love so often is tormented and abused by life? The spotlight of circumstance is turned now on one, now on another, as if seeking to find out.

Its light is focused on Cecily now. Dick knows about his expected child and every quality in his manhood has leapt into eager response to this proof of his own continuity. He cannot be too tender; he is fearful lest somehow things go wrong, and yet immensely sure that everything will be successful. He assures himself that this is a common happening and carries within himself the proud knowledge of an event that is absolutely unique. He is very curious about the physiological marvel, as all men are who for the first time watch themselves so mysteriously reproduced. And with it all—all the pride that he feels in his coming child—Cecily remains his young wife as well as his child's mother and he feels apologetic that this must hurt her—even endanger her—and he loves her beyond his pride and hope. Cecily's mother knows and surrounds Cecily with every precaution and comfort,

seeming to guard her a little jealously now, even from Dick. Cecily has given up dancing and most society, and society, noticing—ever on the *qui vive* for these domestic interludes and their reactions on the people concerned in them—accepts the situation with a sigh and a smile and a touch of sentiment. Young Mrs. Harrison is going to have a baby—"so soon." Well, opinion divides here.

Matthew hears of it among the casual gossip, through some chance remark about Dick, and goes to call on Cecily again, as if her interest were enhanced for him. Cecily receives him gladly, feeling that she is making a permanent friend and he is one of the few constant visitors at the gray-shingled house. Another is Madeline Von Vlectenburg, now Madeline Ensign, who has married a Carrington man and come to Carrington to live and whose acquaintance is still so small that she clings to Cecily's companionship; and another is Fliss Horton, who has become very assiduous and helpful in bringing Cecily gayety and Madeline useful gossip. Fliss has the freedom of Cecily's house now and treats Ellen with a charming, friendly informality and Ellen is always glad apparently to set an extra place for Miss Horton at her employer's request.

Ellen knows about the baby too and will let Cecily do nothing for herself if she can help it. She has a tremendous maiden excitement about all the preparations and in secret is knitting a pink afghan. In secret—for she never refers to the coming event except by the most modestly veiled of allusions.

Yet, with all this light focused upon her, with all this care and tenderness surrounding her, Cecily withdrew into herself, more like her mother than she had ever been before. Her fears had lessened with the sense of enveloping support and knowledge and the many preparations normalized the months, but there grew in her

a consciousness of isolation like nothing she had ever known before. It would come upon her sometimes in the midst of her friends, listening to the idle talk of Madeline and Fliss—sometimes when she was with Dick. It was not at all lonely or unpleasant—only a feeling of being set apart. She tried to explain it to Dick.

"It's like recognizing suddenly that you are part of a design—it's strangely impersonal."

And again—

"But I'm not worried, Dick, dear. I'm interested and happy. Just because I'm silent now and then you mustn't think I'm sad. I can't help feeling responsible."

"It's the first time I've ever felt really responsible, you see. I've always been guided; people have always taken me all the way. Once in the convent when the priest told us about marriage I got awfully afraid. I suppose I sensed then that you had to go part of the way alone."

"Yes, I know. You're all with me and will be, but you can't go all the way, darling. I don't mind and I'm not afraid. I've something to go after, something to get."

"Being born," she told him, more whimsically, "must be a terrific process. Perhaps that's why it's fixed so that we can't remember it at all."

Those were the more sober moments, but there was on the whole more gayety than sobriety about the impending birth. Even Fliss, who held strong views on motherhood and had more than once remarked that she did not mean to be ever "tied down," enjoyed looking at the beautiful baby clothes and the elaborate equipment which were showered upon Cecily, and they all talked about it a great deal with a gay frankness and humor utterly unrestrained by the presence of the men of the intimate circle.

At dinners, at which Cecily, dressed in some lovely

loose robe, presided, Fliss naturally fell to Matthew and every one but Matthew himself fostered the pairing. Fliss, playing her game and hating her home background more every day, waited for something to come of all this. While she waited she played with Dick and it often happened that Matthew drifted to Cecily's side while the others amused themselves. And Fliss made a confidant of Dick and asked his advice, thereby establishing a bond, for not only did Dick enjoy giving the advice, but he was naturally curious to see whether Fliss would take it and if she did take it, whether it would work out well and prove him wise.

Fliss asked him if he didn't think she ought to go to work. That was her temporary line of conversation, but Dick didn't know that. He pondered it seriously.

"At what?"

"I've had no training and of course I'm not clever. I suppose I'd have to take up stenography and go into some one's office."

"Surely you can find something better than that."

"What? I can't teach and I wouldn't want to, anyway. And what else is there for a girl who doesn't know anything about anything and whose only cleverness is in trimming hats?"

"Start a hat shop."

"You need money for that, Dick."

"You need money for everything. You'll have to face that, unless you marry it."

"That, too, has been suggested. But it's not so easy to find some one with money whom you can marry."

Dick's eyes strayed to the other end of the room.

"How about Matthew?"

"Matthew hasn't asked me."

"Shall I tell him to ask you?" teased Dick.

"If you like. But he won't—even though I wouldn't

marry him if he did. I want something a little different from Matthew."

"A shade more jazz."

"A shade more jazz is right!"

"Matthew is ruled out."

Matthew turned to call to them. "Who is taking my name in vain?"

Fliss crossed the room negligently. "We were discussing," she told him with her engaging impudence, "the possibility of your marrying me."

"Am I going to do it?"

"No. Rest easy. I've refused you in advance."

"Because you haven't enough jazz," contributed Dick.

"Reason enough. But I wonder why I haven't more of that peculiar quality. Of course it's always existed under a variety of names so I can't say I didn't happen along in the right generation. I never did have it. Perhaps because I had to go to work too young."

"Well, I should have gone to work young, and I always had it," said Fliss.

Cecily was following them amusedly. "And I never had to work at all and I haven't it."

"Convent training."

"No, look at Madeline. She's full of the same spirit Fliss is full of."

"And Dick?"

"Dick's a jazzier thrown into high company," mocked Fliss.

"Dick's a jazzier—reformed." Dick put his arm about his wife's shoulders and drew her close to him. "You're all wrong. Jazzing or whatever you call it is purely a matter of age. When you draw near thirty you get over it, just as the average man gets over tennis."

"But I'm not thirty."

"No," said Dick, looking down at her tenderly, "but

you've other fish to fry. Besides you can't be classified."

"French model, one only." Fliss could always be counted on to remain flippant. The others caught her note with amusement.

It was one of their many idle, undeveloped, cross-purposed conversations, which in spite of its lightness had a kind of function in bringing them nearer together, teaching them what to expect from each other, revealing their quality to each other. The weeks slipped along, each one important and interesting in its relation to the coming of Cecily's child, bringing that great anticipation closer to them. And the lives of all of them clung to their own little orbits in the midst of a storm already world devastating, though there were many moments when they all shivered as some great tragedy, dulled by distance, came over the wires and through the papers to them. Cecily, of course, dated all things by the fifteenth of May, and as the winter changed into spring and the whole world opened happily under the warming sun, she was more and more eager to bring her waiting to a close. Dick was impatient, she knew, and that made her more so. She was catching some of Dick's quality as she lived with him. She was trying to learn how to frost the depths of the spiritual isolation which was absorbing her with a surface companionship during hours which demanded lightness. There was some sacrifice in learning this new lightness, but she had a vague feeling that it would make Dick happy if she were not only happy, but gay.

The wonder of Cecily was that she was twenty, as yet unbigoted, and that her personality was still vague in its outlines. The convent was of course mainly responsible for this—in leaving so much to God. The implied educational method of most schools and colleges is that you have to work things out "on your own" as definitely as possible—work out God, too, when you get to it—

but the convent method was not so. When things became tangled or overerudite, or too introspective, or embarrassing and indelicate, the gentle nuns turned the solutions over to God and left them there without asking for an accounting. Working with material like Cecily they took care to perfect her English and her French, even if they totally neglected economics, gave her a cultural knowledge of science and a knowledge of history, which was colored by faith in the church, and sent her out with a clean mind. There were plenty of fine fresh minds coming out of women's colleges every day, but their freshness was like the antiseptic freshness of a laboratory after corruption has been studied and its traces scoured away; Cecily's was the freshness of the out-of-doors, which is different. Mental and emotional qualities were still to develop and, stepping as she did into marriage so quickly, she had all of psychology, all of philosophy, to learn. The bag of women's tricks, already so thoroughly ransacked by Fliss, was quite unknown to Cecily.

While Dick was teaching her love and some gayeties as well, she was learning other things. It was absurd to say that Matthew had set himself to the forming of her mind—what he did was too intangible for him to have had a definite purpose—but still, he did try to help Cecily to think. Undoubtedly it was at first for the pure pleasure of seeing the effect that much discussed themes would have upon a mind as inexperienced as hers that Matthew introduced many of his conversations. Her ready response led him further. He lent her books, catching up the broken thread of a conversation about some problem by sending her relevant printed thought; he stimulated her mind constantly. And the mind, which must have been a reproduction in part at least of Allgate Moore's mind, the part which was responsible for the fact that

people called him "genius," began to grow. Such a year for Cecily! There were many nights when she sat listening to the men talking about the affairs which were absorbing almost all thinking people's minds—the sinking of ships at sea, the slaughters of war, the advances and retreats of the hostile armies, the surmises as to new alliances—all of it deepening in Cecily her natural sense of the gravity of the world's affairs and of the world's dangers. Then when they stopped—and they would stop when her comments or queries became too intense, too worried—she always marveled at the way they, and Dick especially, could spring back to lightness of thought and word.

It was at Matthew's suggestion that they went to Allenby. Allenby, as well as being Matthew's surname, was the name given in his honor to a little village at the mouth of one of the mines in which Matthew had large interests. Dick had been offered the stock which one of the directors was relinquishing and expressed a curiosity to see the place. Matthew said he would drive him down if he would take a day off.

"I can't leave Cecily very well," said Dick.

"Bring Cecily."

"Now?"

"It won't hurt her. The roads are fine; state roads—no frost holes. We can get across to Judith for the night. There's a very decent inn there where we could stop."

"Yes, I know the place. I'll ask Cecily. Maybe she'd like it."

It was the second week in April. Mrs. Warner did not especially approve of the trip, but Cecily had set her heart on it.

"Well," compromised her mother, "if they drive slowly

it probably won't hurt you. Don't go down any mines. And it's still cold; take plenty of rugs."

To balance the party they had asked Fliss, though, as Fliss said, she was not sure whether she was chaperoning Cecily or Cecily her, and they started off early on a Saturday morning, Matthew and Dick proving that it was a business trip by sitting together in the front seat. Lunch from thermos bottles and a picnic basket hardly halted them and they reached Allenby in the middle of the afternoon.

It was, as Matthew said, hardly a village. There was a railway station and about it were grouped houses and cheap stores flanking the side of brief indefinite streets of rutted red clay. Its newness was ugly, but, looking at it, one knew its age would be worse. It had no possibility of growing to charm and dignity from such beginnings. It was a necessity—nothing more. Their comments as they looked at it were characteristic. Fliss had the first word.

"So this is where your money comes from."

Matthew and Dick both laughed. "It's quite a settlement, isn't it?" said Dick. "I'd no idea the place was so big. You must have a thousand people in the village."

"And more squatted around the mine itself. You'll see later." Matthew turned to Cecily. "What do you think of my namesake?"

"It seems a desolate place for people to live—a miserable place. I should think you could make it a little more attractive."

"That's not good sociology; that's charity."

They left their car at the railroad station and wandered about the village, Dick growing enthusiastic over things which seemed pathetic to Cecily, and Fliss amusing herself with comments and trying to dazzle the people she saw. She insisted that they should have a soda at the

store and over that she was very merry and mocking. Matthew dragged them away.

"It gets dark early and we must see the mine yet."

The road to the mine was rough and led through a waste of ugly fields, covered with discolored vegetation. It was growing colder and the dead bushes shook in the wind. The girls huddled themselves in rugs and began to think of dinner and the Inn. The mine was interesting, but——

Dick and Matthew, however, had grown absorbed by this time. They were deep in statistics; they looked interestedly and speculatively over the barren fields and with real admiration at a group of one story huts grouped together near the great red pit which was the mine.

"Some of the people have to live close for various reasons," explained Matthew over his shoulder. "In case of a blizzard we have to keep a force fairly close. There are about a hundred men who live here. A few have their families, but most of them are unmarried and live in bunk houses."

A number of children bore witness to the existence of the families. They were very dirty children—stolid little Scandinavians, most of them. The automobile awoke their interest. They measured its difference from the half-dozen begrimed Fords which were casually lined up on one side of the mine office.

"Want to go down, Fliss? Cecily mustn't."

"Love it," said Fliss.

"We'll just go down to the first level," Matthew decided, "to give Fliss an idea. You must put on overalls though. Come in the office and they'll fix you out. I've had lots of women here. It's all right."

Cecily watched them from the depths of the car as they disappeared over the edge of the mine, walking on a kind of circular path—Fliss looking like an extremely rakish

boy in her overalls. Then she settled herself to wonder again how these people lived and how it was worth living without any beauty or any comfort—or love. She wondered if women loved these rough, unpleasant-looking men now emerging in little groups. They all went to the office. It was Saturday night and they were getting their pay. They stared at Cecily and the car, some stolidly, some hostile in their glances. Vaguely she wished Dick would come back.

Suddenly a man paused beside the car. He was obviously angry. She had seen him leave the office, slamming the door with an oath that carried to her ears, and as he came down the road and she knew he must pass the car, she felt his hostility even before he spoke. He did not shout, but he came to a pause and his voice was low and menacing and his face full of hate.

"Sit there, damn you, and grin. They fired me—and they'll pay for it. You'll all pay for it, you damned blood suckers. You——"

Then he called Cecily a name which she had never heard before, but which was utterly clear in its implication, even to her, and went swiftly down the road, lost in the increasing crowd of homegoing men. Cecily had gone dead white. She became conscious of crowds of men pouring past her now and she felt every face ferocious. She did not want to look at them and yet she could not help it. She felt suddenly that she was affronting them. This car, her furs, her luxury of robes, their shacks! And Dick did not come. Where was he? Why did he not come? Had they caught him and Matthew down in the mine? Had something happened? She tried to reassure herself, but her shocked mind went tearing on into confusion. Then in the midst of it came a pain, a tearing pain like nothing she had felt ever before. Dick, coming up beside Fliss and Matthew, all three

laughing and talking to one of those men who had so terrified Cecily, saw his wife, white-faced—staring.

They were all immensely frightened and too inexperienced to be sure what steps were best to take. Even Cecily was not sure that her hour had really begun, but before they got back to the little village there was not much room for doubt. Dick and Matthew looked at each other in utter consternation. They were four hours away from all the elaborate preparations for the advent of Cecily's child; they both had heard of accidents. The ride back home was not to be attempted, but here, in this forlorn little mining town——

In those first hours it was Cecily herself who took the initiative. In an interval between the pains she lifted her head from Dick's shoulder with an actual smile.

"Apparently I'm going to spoil the party; and I can't get back home. Find me a place to stay over night, Dick—the cleanest house there is. And telephone Dr. Wilson. In the meantime get hold of the doctor here."

They did as she said. The little frame house of the mine superintendent was made ready and the superintendent's wife, a Swedish woman of forty, after her first bewilderment took command of the situation and Cecily with stolid sympathy. Cecily, in a strange hummocky bed, wearing a coarse cotton flannel nightgown, soon lost the connection between reality and nightmares. Nothing was real about her—the face of the Swede woman with her guttural reassurances, the bearded man who they said was the doctor, but who seemed unable to relieve her torture—but through it all her mind pounded along on a steady track of fear and determination. She might lose her baby—she would not lose her baby—they must take care. She kept giving directions, pathetic directions, about that.

Matthew had found the doctor and after a look at

Cecily he told them that they would have no time to send for their own physician. He did not seem much concerned about it all and was inclined to take it all very easily. He was a middle-aged man—Swedish also—with a blond beard and abstracted blue eyes.

"But," said Dick, "there's not even a nurse!"

The doctor smiled. "Fifty babies in six months in this village," he said, "and no nurse for any of them. This lady (pointing to Fliss) and Mrs. Olson will help me—and you, if I need you."

But it seemed none the less terrible. Matthew and Dick pooled their knowledge of such events. Fliss stayed by Cecily, remarkably calm, helping Mrs. Olson in her meager preparations, but white to her lips. And each half hour the cloud of pain and worry thickened over the little house. It was a cold night. Mrs. Olson had sent her children to a neighbor's house. Dick and Matthew, in the kitchen, tried to conceal their fears.

"Why was I such a damned fool as to bring her?" cried Dick.

"I wish I hadn't suggested it, but we did and we're here. We'll have to see it through, Dick. The chances are ninety to one that it will come out all right, old man." But he, too, was white and his hand shook a little as he poked at the fire in the stove.

Fliss came in and stood leaning against the door. They jumped up. She gave them a few directions.

"Hunt through the drug store yourself," she finished. "We must be sure the things are right. I'll watch."

"Do you think you can, Fliss?" Dick sounded doubtful and Fliss, leaning against the door, did not look too competent. Her skirt was too short and her hair too elaborate.

"I've got to," she answered. "I don't know much, but I've heard things—enough to know what to avoid."

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They had reached Carrington by telephone and knew that Cecily's mother, Cecily's nurse and Cecily's doctor were now on their way to Allenby, but it would be three or four hours before they could arrive even with the greatest of speed. The local doctor had assured them that it would be over before that. The two men could hear strange sounds that did not seem natural—cries that hurt almost unbearably to hear. The footsteps overhead were hurried.

"Do you think—already?" asked Dick.

Then they both heard it.

Fliss came in again. Her hair was disordered and her face as pale as before. She faced them with startled, angry eyes.

"So that's what women have to go through," she said, "and you never get a taste of it! My Lord, but it's fierce!"

Dick had pushed past her, upstairs. It seemed as if Matthew were about to follow, and restrained himself.

"Is something wrong?" he asked hoarsely. "Is she——"

Fliss actually laughed. All the primitive sex antagonism in her had seemed to leap out suddenly. She was angrily on guard, fiercely angry at all men, so free of this agony—quite at her best as she stood there in her wrath.

"Oh, no, nothing's wrong. It's bad enough when it's right. Dick's got his baby all right."

She sat down at table with her face in her hands. Matthew's face relaxed a little and he patted Fliss clumsily on the shoulders.

"You're a brick, Fliss."

She recovered herself quickly and looked up, brushing

her hair back, her burst of anger seeming quite spent, a wan humor asserting itself.

"There was much the same situation when I was born," she said reflectively. "Do you suppose that child will have the same sentiments towards me that I have towards Mrs. Ellis? I forgot to tell you—it's a girl."

CHAPTER X

THE dawn brought confidence and no small feeling of triumph to all of them. The nurse, the Carrington specialist and Cecily's mother all arrived and with the verdict of the trusted doctor that the baby was small but healthy and that Cecily was in no danger, they all began to enjoy the adventure in retrospect. Cecily could not be moved for at least ten days and the nurse tried to arrange the room as pleasantly and conveniently as possible, rather arousing a smoldering ire in Mrs. Olson until Dick, taking her aside, slipped a check into her hand of sufficient size to feed and clothe the little Olsons for the winter. After that the nurse had things her own way. Much of Cecily's equipment had been brought already and her stepfather arrived later with a great bunch of roses that towered above Mrs. Olson's best white water pitcher. It was obviously impossible for them all to stay in Allenby. Mrs. Warner took a room at a neighbor's house, the nurse stayed with Cecily on a camp bed imported from Carrington, and everything became quickly ordered and made comfortable by the ease of wealth. But the shock, the healthy encounter with an experience which is no respecter of wealth and convenience, was to remain in the minds of each of the four participants for a long time.

Matthew was to take Fliss back to Carrington in the afternoon, for Dick refused to stir for another twenty-four hours. Sleeping in the kitchen with Mr. Olson meant nothing to him, he declared. So he stayed. The

nurse was keeping Cecily very quiet, but she let the departing adventurers in for a few moments. Matthew saw first the big clothes basket on a chair by the window and then Cecily, with her hair braided tightly back and dark circles under her eyes. For an instant he looked from one to the other, obviously unable to speak.

"Take a look at my daughter," said Cecily.

Matthew obeyed. Then he came over to the bedside and looked at Cecily, laying a nervous, strangely hot hand on hers.

"It's a shame I got you into all this."

"It's worked out all right and it wasn't your fault at all. I insisted on coming. The baby's healthy and I'm strong—and the experience! You've told me I lacked experience and that my life was cushioned. Well, this wasn't cushioned."

"God knows it wasn't."

The girls looked at each other and Cecily suddenly felt her eyes fill with tears.

"I'll never forget your seeing me through, Fliss. Never."

Fliss bent over her and kissed her. She had passed the stage of her first emotion and was ready to recognize what a lucky incident the whole thing had been for her. Mrs. Warner had said the same thing that Cecily had just said. She was established in that family and she knew it. Now that Cecily was comfortable, that she was out of peril and surrounded by American Beauty roses, down comforters and in her own silk nightdress, Fliss could afford to take account of stock and see how her own had risen.

"Good-by, Cecily. When you get back to town I'll be around to see you."

"As soon as I get back," Cecily pledged her.

"Take care of my foster daughter."

There was an interesting moment—as Fliss crossed to the improvised cradle and stood looking down at the baby, an expression on her face which could mask no ulterior motive. The queer little thing that she had seen come into the world, struggling, seemed to make her feel shaken.

“Come on, Matthew, Cecily’s tired and we must hurry.”

It was a strange convalescence and perhaps an unusually healthy one, for there was no excitement and a great deal of quiet. The brunt of the inconvenience now fell on the nurse and Cecily had only to lie for long, silent hours, thinking over the whole wonderful event. She listened to the voices of the children outside her window, marveling that they had been born just as her child was born, and the roots of that solidarity of motherhood which all mothers feel for each other began to grow in her. She had come to that stage in marriage when the mysteries are shared, not with one other individual, but with a whole sex. Dimly the great expansiveness of motherhood began to dawn upon her mind.

All this expressed itself not only in her dreaming, but in her curiosity. She plied the nurse with questions. Physiology and psychology of other mothers fascinated her. The cases of the nurse, in so far as she would talk about them, were an endless source of interest. Dick joined her in her interest. Step by step they went over the story of the birth again and again. But then Dick left it and went to town, carrying with him the consciousness of his fatherhood, to be sure, but temporarily overlaying that interest with business and masculine contact. Cecily lay in bed and thought and talked on about women and mothers. She had not the slightest intention of playing upon her illness. She was quick to feel her energy coming back and rejoiced in it. There was not a

suggestion of querulousness in her manner. That she took the luxury and the petting which surrounded her as things natural to her was not to be wondered at.

But there was a great deal of praising and petting, and while Dick was triumphant he was also surrounded by an atmosphere that made him feel vaguely apologetic for having to undergo so little inconvenience himself. He was ready enough to admit the apparent unfairness of the situation. Not that it had ever struck him before. If he had considered it at all before his marriage he would have said that women had to have children, but men had to rustle to support them and called it fair enough. In the face of his personal situation it seemed different. Cecily, frail and pitiable, seemed indeed to be bearing the heavy end.

It was Fliss who got a real sociological slant on the situation. She visited Cecily's house before Cecily returned to Carrington, ostensibly to return a scarf which she had borrowed of Cecily for the eventful ride, but really to see and have a gossip with Ellen. Ellen was scrupulous. She would not join Fliss in the living-room and Fliss was compelled to sit in Cecily's room while Ellen polished the furniture. Ellen was very much excited about all that had happened—a little disappointed at not having been nearer the center of action herself, but determined to make up for that by making Cecily's homecoming as comfortable as possible. The baby having been born, the pink afghan had been hastened to completion and now lay in state on the foot of the crib.

"Poor Mrs. Harrison," said Ellen, "she's been through a lot, hasn't she?"

Fliss shrugged her shoulders in impatience. "You all make me sick," she said; "she hasn't been through more than any other woman, has she?"

But she gave Ellen no chance to answer.

"She had a bad time for twenty-four hours—no, about twelve hours. And for that the whole town sits back and gasps with pity, because it's Cecily—Cecily who's been used to 'everything.' What got on my nerves was to see what all women had to suffer. But I don't see that Cecily hasn't got it so much easier than most people that she doesn't need my pity or any one else's. Nurses and doctors and silk quilts and embroidered layettes take a good deal of sting out of having babies, I should think. And Dick acting as if he ought to grovel in the earth because his wife presented him with a baby! I dropped in to see May Robinson on the way here to-day. She's expecting another and doing her own housework. And her husband is on the road and only gets home for week ends. May isn't being so darn coddled. She's worried sick about how they're going to afford the new one. I can't say that I'm especially sorry for Cecily."

Ellen gave the dressing table a last flourishing polish and took refuge in her usual philosophy.

"Well, that's how things are," she said. "Some people have more than others. But that's no reason why you can't be sorry for a pretty young girl like Mrs. Harrison having a thing like that happen when she's miles away from home and help and all."

"She had me," grinned Fliss, and went on with a brief recital of what she and Mrs. Olson had done. Ellen listened with interest, although with some embarrassment.

"It was certainly fine of you, Fliss."

"Fine nothing. It was the luckiest thing that ever came my way."

Ellen looked her question.

"Don't you see how solid it makes me with the Harrisons? It gives me a real connection. Cecily never will forget a single thing that happened, and among other things she probably won't forget that I was the first

person to hold her baby. Yes—the greatest luck I ever had, for there's more than that to it. Matthew Allenby knows I'm on earth at last. Of course, it's Cecily he's gone on, but because he thinks I was useful for once—especially to the angelic Cecily—he actually noticed me as if I were more than a mechanical toy. And he's quite a person, Ellen!”

Ellen did not answer and Fliss began to wander around the room looking at things. She opened Cecily's wardrobe and pushed dress after dress along the sliding rod in envious review.

“Lord, what it must be to be rich,” she sighed, “what fun—what fun!”

“Come,” said Ellen, “come out in the kitchen and I'll fix you a bit of lunch. You need it,” she added sagely. “You're always sort of longing when you're hungry.”

Fliss laughed and caught her cousin around the waist, waltzing her about ecstatically.

“You old darling—wait till I am rich and see what I'll do for you.”

“Look out—Mrs. Harrison's rugs,” cautioned Ellen.

CHAPTER XI

THE baby changed from a novelty into a treasure; to the period of ecstatic delight there succeeded the scientific business of infant care. The expert nurse having brought her patient back to Carrington and attended her there until she was full of renewed energy, left and Cecily took charge of her own baby. There was a nurse-maid during the daytime, but at night when the sudden, piercing little cry sounded from the next room it was Cecily herself who went to find out whether it was hunger or cold that caused it. The responsibility matured her as responsibility matures the average woman. It tired her physically and numbed her mind a little.

"You mustn't let your cradle become an obsession," said her mother.

"Of course not. I wouldn't let myself get too absorbed. It wouldn't be fair to Dick," said Cecily, rather automatically.

"I wonder if you give Dick quite the attention you used to?"

Cecily looked up, surprised.

"It's very common," said her mother easily, "to think too much about the baby and too little about the husband at this time. I hope I don't seem intrusive, darling, but you stay at home rather a lot."

"I have to get back to the baby, you see, if I do go out."

"The baby is six months old, now. You and Dick ought

to go away for a vacation. I'll stay here and get a trained nurse for the baby."

Cecily did not take her up, but she watched Dick that night at dinner. They did not seem to talk as much as they used to—except about Dorothea. She crossed over to his place and put her hand softly under his chin.

"Do I neglect you, Dick, dear—for the baby?"

"Do I look neglected?" countered Dick. "Nonsense. Don't talk like a problem play. Besides, how could you neglect me for Dorothea? She's me, isn't she?" And he smiled engagingly as only Dick could smile. "If I catch you neglecting me, you'll hear from me. Who brought this on? Who've you been talking to?"

"Nobody. Mother just suggested that I might be a bit too concentrated. She wanted me to go away and leave her in charge."

"Good idea. I think I could do it next month—if we aren't going to war."

"We must wait until after Christmas," demurred Cecily.

But after Christmas they did not go at once. In January Cecily paid a secret visit to her doctor. When she came home she sat down in her straightest living-room chair and looked about her a little queerly. She was still sitting there half an hour later when Dick came home.

"Well," said Dick, "how's my family?"

Cecily made a feeble little joke, which showed considerable progress in adjustment.

"Increasing," she said, with a catch in her voice.

Dick wheeled around.

"Why, Cecily,—why, you don't mean we're going to have another!"

She nodded at him, a medley of expressions on her face, all of them overlaid with that wondering question as to how he would take it.

"You're sure?"

"Quite."

They sat down and held each other rather tightly. Responsibilities, more than toys, more than novelties, spread before them. Then like a clear ray of light the same thought came to both of them.

"They'll be great companions for each other."

"I was thinking about that."

Fliss came in that night. There was more than usual radiance in her face. She dashed up for a visit to the nursery, down again to show Dick a new dance step and Cecily felt a little wistful as she watched her. Waiting—illness—the stretch looked very long. She wondered what Fliss would say if she knew.

But Fliss was full of herself and in no mood to inspire confidences. "Why the million-dollar mood?" asked Dick.

Fliss laughed and flushed a little. "I've had something happen to me—something nice."

"Secret? Tell us," begged Cecily. "I want to hear something pleasant."

"It's a real thrill. I'm engaged to be married. I'm to be married next month."

"Who?"

Fliss had never looked more charming, more provocative. She dangled a gay little slipper from her toes and looked at them half teasingly.

"You'd never guess. A real high-brow. What he'll ever do with me I don't know. But he can't get away now." And then, worked up to her climax, "I told him I was going to tell you when he wasn't around—I wanted the fun. It's Matthew."

"Well, isn't that great!" said Dick, with the sincerest congratulation for Fliss and a more than faint wonder

in his tone. But Fliss, if she analyzed his tone at all, was not disturbed. She was looking at Cecily.

Over Cecily's first shock of surprise there clouded a sense of relinquishment, unacknowledged. Deliberately she made herself pleased.

"It's wonderful." And, more courteous than Dick, she added, "I'm awfully glad for Matthew."

Possibly she was not quite quick enough to say it. A little flash lit up Fliss's brilliant face and she countered with quick frankness. "I get a lot more out of it than Matthew, but he'll get something, according to my lights, and I may make him happier than people will expect. And," most laughingly, "we can't all be perfect Cecily. And you were taken."

If Cecily thought the remark based on more than flippancy she gave no sign. When Matthew and Fliss came to see them a few days later and he was alone with Cecily for a few moments she was all congratulation.

"She'll keep you young, Matthew. She's always so gay. I can see Dick brighten up whenever she comes in until I'm almost jealous. All men like her."

"Is that a recommendation for a wife?" he asked a little gravely.

"Don't be foolish. You know that I mean you'll be very happy."

"I will be happy," he answered. "I am happy." He paused and looked at her intently. "I am glad that I am going to be married to Fliss and I am glad that you are alive. We take what we can get of happiness."

When he had gone she did not analyze his words. She did not want to. She put the thought of them aside, her thoughts turning to the things that were always in her mind now. The new baby, and was there going to be a war?

BOOK TWO

BOOK TWO

CHAPTER XII

FLISS—still Fliss despite the dignity of the name of Allenby—was, after two years, still attracting attention. She reacted to it exactly as she had reacted to her own popularity at the High School dances. It enhanced every sparkling quality.

She had been busy. After her marriage, enforcedly quiet because it would never do to draw unnecessary attention to the social unimportance of her family, she and Matthew had gone traveling. They had had a good time. She hung on his arm and petted him; she begged for things and was enthusiastically grateful for them when he gave them to her. She kept him laughing and herself in constant good temper and in every fresh extravagance of silk or fur or velvet she was prettier than before. Matthew laughed at her and let her pet him and expanded. He called her a little crook and she admitted it, but he never had the bad taste to ask her if she would have married him if he had been poor. They were frank with each other, but never moved much below the easy surface of things. Never had Matthew really played before, and under her skillful leadership he learned a good deal about play. He learned the fun of extravagance. His mother had not been a person to accept money or presents easily. Fliss rose resplendent from a shower of them. And from the depths of her little savage heart she was grateful for presents, for relief

from sordidness; and grateful most of all for the sheer content with the life he made possible.

"Don't we have *fun?*" she would say in her strongest italics, every now and then, with a swift little caress that was perfectly honest in its affection as far as it went.

"We do," he would acknowledge with smiling, amused understanding—more than that, with pleasure.

He had his second glimpse of his wife's remarkable adaptability when they visited his mother. His mother had been duly written of his marriage, had duly written to say she expected to see them while they were on their wedding trip, and, moved by some impulse, Matthew had deliberately sandwiched a week in the little Indiana town between the more brilliant points on their itinerary. They arrived in Peachtree about nightfall, stepping from the jumpy local train to a station platform dripping with rain and lit only by the dingy glow from a quick lunch counter window. Fliss, well acclimated by this time to waiting red-caps and taxis, looked about her and then at Matthew with amusement.

"You are completely out of the picture," said Matthew. "You look shockingly resplendent up against Peachtree. Don't look about you for cabs; there are no cabs. No one needs cabs here."

His mother rounded the corner of the station house, driving her umbrella before her. Matthew seemed to recognize her by the swish of her skirts in the rain. He took her umbrella and kissed her gravely.

"Good boy," she said. "Is this Florence?"

Fliss reached half way up on Mrs. Allenby's spare, tall form. She was silhouetted for a moment against the black dress of the older woman. Then Mrs. Allenby inspected the bags.

"Dave Johnson can bring up your grips. You can't

manage the four of them in this rain, even if it is only a step."

They left the bags and Fliss, as they went along together, had a consciousness of wooden sidewalks in indifferent repair, of the stillness of a country village after the train has gone through, of a town gone to bed unreasonably early.

Up a little path which crunched under their feet, on a tiny porch where a rocking chair stood grotesquely upside down so that its seat might be protected from the rain, through a low door. Matthew struck a match and, moving familiarly in the darkness, lit a lamp. They were in the parlor.

Fliss had known poverty and shabbiness. This was different from anything she had ever known. It was the acme of thrift, of cleanliness, of economy and respectability, and pride. The very glow in the Franklin stove, coming through the isinglass, was stiff and correct. The furniture, the prideful Brussels rug with its over-pink central cluster of roses was clean to extremity. The tidies on the chair backs were straight. The Bible, flanked by an imposing parlor table volume, margined the white cover on the center table. The young Mrs. Allenby, standing in the midst of the intensity of order, felt as exotic and out of place as she looked. But her mother-in-law, quickly divested of coat and hat, was on her own ground. She gave Fliss a moment to gain her impression and then led her upstairs to a bedroom which carried out the spirit of the parlor. Fliss looked dubiously at the white crocheted bedspread so perfectly wrinkleless, at the smooth chair tidies and then at Matthew.

"If I should soil something!" she exclaimed in mock terror. "I shall die if I do, Matthew! Where did your mother keep you when you were home? Not in here?"

"No, I slept in the back room. Can you make yourself comfortable?"

"Well, I'm frightened."

"Little liar! I want you to behave yourself."

"Behave? I'm a model of decorum. But, oh, for a gingham dress! How long are we going to stay—how long will your mother keep me?"

"A week is about the shortest."

"Well," sighed Fliss, inspecting her face in the mirror, "this mirror makes humps in my face, but I'd do a lot for you, Matthew. If your mother can stand me—all right, down we go."

The supper was laid in the tiny dining-room off the living-room. A polished china lamp in the middle of the table was the centerpiece, and the dishes and linen were as spotless as everything else. Matthew and his mother talked casually about local gossip and Fliss watched Matthew, totally unfamiliar in this aspect, in his pleasant interest in the lives of the grocer, the new druggist and the business of the church. Mrs. Allenby, it seemed, was religious. Fliss decided, as she listened to her mother-in-law, that Matthew's business ability must have come from his mother. She faced a picture of Matthew's father, hanging over the low door. It was an enlarged photograph, done in cruel colors, but even the glassy blue which the enlarger had given to the eyes of Mr. Allenby, senior, could not disguise the fact that their expression was mild and guileless. Perhaps he, too, had an undeveloped taste for French poetry.

"Have you furnished your house?" asked Mrs. Allenby.

"We aren't going to take a house at once. There's an apartment hotel where we shall live for a while."

"Hotel?"

"It's not a traveler's hotel, mother," said Matthew. "It is a place where the apartments are furnished and there

is a common dining-room where you can take your meals if you like."

"Later we can find a house," supplied Fliss, "but rents are high."

"I should think you'd buy a house, now that you're well off, Matthew." The sharp, questioning eyes of the old lady flashed from her son to his wife. "Don't you like housekeeping, Florence?"

"I don't know a thing about it," said Fliss, with her usual frankness. She seemed to have hit the right note with Matthew's mother.

"Well, most girls don't until they marry. But after you're married, it comes natural—like taking care of children."

There was no embarrassment in the face of her laughter-in-law, only a trace of distaste. She was silent, and the older woman did not pursue the subject. They talked of the price of food and of Mrs. Allenby's gooseberry jam. Then Matthew smoked in the little parlor and Fliss insisted, in the human way she could, upon swathing her broadcloth suit with one of Mrs. Allenby's aprons and helping with the dishes. Mrs. Allenby eyed her a little grimly as Fliss stacked the dishes one on top of the other without scraping off the left-over food, and Fliss caught the look.

"I'm a shock as a daughter-in-law," she said flippantly, and yet without impudence.

"Well," answered Mrs. Allenby, "I might not have picked you out for Matthew, but he might have done a lot worse. You're pretty and a man likes a pretty woman. I always wished I'd been prettier. Matthew's father was a gentleman, but he did like pretty things. And then you're honest with my boy."

"I am honest; I'll always be honest. I promise you, Mrs. Allenby. I'm silly and I haven't much brains and

I suppose you can see that in most ways I'm not in Matthew's class, but I'm going to try to give him a good time and I'm honest with him."

She meant more than that, but it was hard to say and, after all, unnecessary. Mrs. Allenby gave her a little approbative tap on the shoulder.

"Good girl," she said. "Don't you worry. I can see things. It isn't always the useful woman a man likes. I can see you aren't much for housekeeping—and babies. Some women aren't. But just so as you make him happy"—she paused and finished on a beautifully soft note—"he's a lovely boy."

It was rarely that Fliss felt that some one understood her. She felt it now. But both of them being very practical and unsentimental, they carried the discussion no further. Mrs. Allenby cloaked herself in her sharp efficiency and Fliss airily polished the plates. She told Matthew that night that she was going to get on well with his mother. It was then that he told her that she was adaptable.

"I shall never forget how you acted that night Cecily's baby was born. That was the first time I guessed how adaptable you were."

"That was a funny time," said Fliss, somewhat coldly.

They stayed a week with Mrs. Allenby and by the time they left Fliss had begun to be very jocose and free with her mother-in-law. She showed her how she was teaching Matthew to dance, she rendered popular vaudeville songs on the wheezy old piano, she exhibited all her trousseau lingerie to the old lady with a running fire of absurd comment, and tried to bestow a lace trimmed boudoir cap upon her.

Then they left Peachtree for Chicago and spent a few weeks there, Matthew doing business while Fliss soaked her pagan soul in the luxury of hotels. Fliss loved ho-

tels, their over-deep porcelain baths and the little breakfast tables with shiny silvered dishes and wasteful expanses of white linen, always immaculate. She liked having nothing to do with the machinery of her comfort, to have a telephone at her bedside which could whisk servitors out of space to do her bidding. And she liked the great hotel lounges and parlors, with their heavy commercialized luxury of velvet and gilt, their desks with low lights at which one might sit and write letters while engaging the attention of any good-looking men who might be passing. Padded corridors, handsome men and luxurious women, dining-rooms pompous with elaborate service, the ceaseless flow of people who might be coming from anything and going anywhere—it all completely captured that roving spirit of excitement which was Fliss's imagination. She watched with ecstasy, copying here, adapting there, learning every minute.

The nervousness of buying which always accompanies a small, overworked purse, had disappeared. Fliss had money and she bought with glory, with a certain amount of dignity and restraint too. She passed, as cheap and tawdry, things which she had formerly coveted, but she penetrated the French millinery shops, the dressmaking establishments with a new air, head held high, demanding service like a barbaric princess. It seemed to her that all she had needed to give her complete content was a husband and money. She had no discontents now. She sparkled and glowed and enjoyed from morning until night.

The glow was at its best when they returned to Carington, hurried by the long-pending declaration of war with Germany. From the apartment hotel, where Matthew had rented a friend's suite temporarily, Fliss dashed up to see her mother. She knew exactly how she meant

to deal with her mother. Mrs. Horton must not obtrude or be tedious, and if she were not she would share in Flissy's good fortune. She entered the dreary little flat, infinitely more dreary after the glories of the wedding trip. Her mother came to meet her, kissing her affectionately and admiringly.

"I would have come to the train if you hadn't especially said you didn't want me to, Flissy."

"We got in too late. It was nearly midnight and we were too tired to talk."

Her mother surveyed her with an unconfident look as if not sure of the propriety of her own interest.

"Is everything going nicely, dearie?" she ventured.

"Of course. I had the time of my life. Such fun!" Her glance swept the tawdry walls and furnishings. "I never knew there were such lovely things in the world as I've seen."

"And how is Matthew?"

"Matthew is a darling. He gives me everything, mother. Of course, he's got it to give, but he's such a dear about it. Oh, you just watch me make this town sit up and take notice. Mrs. Matthew Allenby! This fur alone cost Matthew a cool eight hundred. And you should see the things he bought me in Chicago."

"Are you going to live in the hotel?"

"Just until I look around. I want a place of my own, but I don't want to make any mistakes. There's a lot to plan and you and father must come to see us. By the way"—and here she was for once a trifle shamefaced—"I want you to take this. Buy yourself a suit—no, I'll come with you—and a fur (it should be mink, I think)."

"No, Flissy, you spend it on yourself."

"I've gobs of money, mother, and it would help me if you fussed up a bit. I'll want you and dad for dinner,

and you see I want you to look nice." So it was settled and the principle established. Fliss dressed her mother handsomely, and upon that rather protesting lay figure descended certain duties of chaperonage, occasional appearance with Fliss, so that no story could be started regarding Fliss's neglect of her parents. She regulated her mother's appearances, painted in a background. Mrs. Horton was obviously to the world a quiet woman of no social pretensions who had no worse fault than obscurity, and that was no doubt traceable to lack of money. Plain, but nice. In suppressing her parents Fliss would have done herself harm. Bringing them forward in her seemingly ingenuous, but actually deliberate way, she helped herself, and gave them a certain amount of uncomfortable pleasure.

But she gave her mother no intimacy. At first Mrs. Horton took advantage of her daughter's married state to make several leading statements about men and matrimony and was even curious as to the possible plans for a baby. But Fliss repressed such attempts at intimacy ruthlessly. It became very apparent to her mother that as far as Fliss had planned it there were to be no grandchildren, and other domestic confidences were never made.

Fliss established herself and Matthew, after a few months in a hotel, in a house. There had been a few bad weeks when Matthew had told her he was going into the army and she had been compelled to look up the advantages of being left alone so soon after her marriage. But it had come out all right. Matthew was rejected on examination. Some leaky, treacherous valve in his heart cheated him out of his war service. That, coupled with his age, put him out of the running, and a little depressed, but quite controlled, he had accepted as his personal war service the chairmanship of the Car-

rington draft board. He cautioned Fliss about the propriety of economy, but he gave her her house. It was a very new house and its only sins were its newness and its rather elaborate interior decoration. Fliss had not quite learned the restraint of the inner circles of the wealthy. She could imitate them in lavishness, but to pin herself down, hold herself in—that took more careful discipline. Her house was a bit too complete and it showed that Fliss carried nothing over from the past. There was none of her mother's furniture which Fliss could use and though she had coveted some of the things in Matthew's rooms, she found to her dismay that she was not to be allowed to ransack his bachelor apartments. In regard to those Matthew told Fliss that he thought he would keep the furniture for his rooms on the third floor of the new house.

"Of course I have the office, but that is crowded and noisy and impossible to get to after the elevator stops running nights, unless I want to die of heart failure after the tenth flight of stairs. I think I'd like a place where I could study a bit by myself now and then. Let me have my sanctuary upstairs and then when you are entertaining people I don't care about or too many of them I'll sneak off there and not bother you."

Fliss had that divine gift of being able to leave a man alone. She puckered her brow a bit, sized up the fact that his wish was very real, and agreed.

"You are a very satisfactory person to have married," he finished.

"Do you like this place at all?" asked Fliss, looking around her breakfast-room with its old blue curtains, painted furniture and long windows at which two canaries sang charmingly.

"I like it a lot. I like to charm my eyes with it. It suits you exactly, but it's young and there may be times

when I'll feel my age. Then the old furniture will rest me. Understand?"

"Yes," said Fliss, quite truthfully.

So it was arranged. And sometimes when the crowd of people who flocked to Fliss's house—an ever-increasing crowd, whether they came for Red Cross work or for amusement—were too noisy or too heterogeneous for Matthew's taste, he undoubtedly found it sanctuary indeed. It kept him from getting tired of his home, too, kept him able to appreciate its color, its spirit, its accord with a gay, fashionable time. With all these things it was also always comfortable. Fliss could not cook, but she had discretion enough to hire a good cook, to spare no expense on her table, even though she conformed to war regulations outwardly, to have a housemaid who knew how to keep bedrooms fresh and clean and sweet smelling. Matthew's home was orderly; he was subject to no discomforts and he had good food, as well as a wife who carried no flavor of the domestic side of living around with her. Matthew used to like to come into her room, morning or night, and see her, elaborate in negligees, always pretty, always light, always with a smile for him. He called her a good investment and he never criticized her expenditures.

Matthew came first. Fliss was thoroughly honest about that. She attended to his wants with ungrudging pleasure. Then came her next interest, the business that intrigued her greatly and aroused less kindliness and perhaps a slight feeling of revenge—establishing her position in Carrington society.

It was not nearly enough to be counted smart and fashionable by the public who read the society columns and sighed for them. Fliss could gain that end easily enough, but she wanted to be genuinely accepted by the inner circles as well—to have none of the finer lines of

distinction drawn against her. She was armed with a thorough knowledge of the city. She knew who was merely rich and who combined riches with social standing approved not only in Carrington, but in New York, Florida, California. In those rather cruel years between her school and her marriage she had studied little else except the shadings of people's importance. That was to stand her in good stead now, as was her consciousness of her own best weapons in any attack on social citadels—her frankness, her power of deference and her brilliance of manner.

She gave little parties that were very gay and bright and somehow different from other people's little parties—probably because Fliss gave individual attention to each of her guests, in selection and entertainment. She struck the note between the amusing and the risqué and never wavered as she held it. People responded by forgetting that Fliss Allenby had anything to gain by playing her social game well, having too good a time in her company to keep recalling that her steps were premeditated.

To gain an end, she was willing to be bored indefinitely. She went to the war time charitable affairs of older women, if they were important enough, and made a bright spot of color in the company, always deferential to the elder ladies, a little simple in her talk (she avoided pretense of intellectuality like the plague and played up a certain ingenuousness of ignorance that aroused the protective, educative instinct in others). She gave Matthew's money lavishly. She was backed by his real importance and the solidity of his war work. Also she was willing to spend any amount of time on planning her clothes. She was always different from every one else, never fading into the inconspicuous, but always man-

aging to avoid being called cheap or tawdry, even when, like every one else, she made a fashion of economy.

In her own way she was soon unassailable. She became a figure on the social lists. She became important. Then, to crown her luck, just as the war was beginning to make Matthew always unsmiling, always worried; just as she was beginning to see that the world was veering shockingly towards pain and horror—the war was over suddenly. In the reaction from the seriousness, the reaction shared largely by people who had suffered from no strain, Fliss knew how to lead. She led. After more than two years of marriage she was still a person to brighten the public eye with interest. Matthew had taken her traveling several times and it had improved her confidence. She knew pretty largely now what people were talking about when they referred to things they had seen and places they had been outside of Carrington.

Forced out of the City Club one October day by an influx of visiting salesmen come to some convention, Dick Harrison met Fliss at the Lennox restaurant. It occurred to him as he nodded to her that he had not seen much of her lately and, taking a second look which was really due the green feathered turban which closed so piquantly down on her black fringe of hair, he saw that she was apparently alone and crossed at once to sit opposite her. She told him that she was alone and only down town at all because she had been delayed in her shopping.

"It's an awfully busy week. There's such a lot going on that if I don't get my shopping done to-day I'll not have another chance."

"Is it awfully busy?"

"Don't you really know, Dick?" She rattled off a list of functions to him. "Where are you and Cecily anyway these days? Aren't you just a bit too domestic?"

"With three babies you're apt to be a bit domestic. You haven't any, have you, Fliss?"

Fliss laughed at his thrust. "Don't be nasty, Dick. You know well I haven't. You and Cecily have probably decided I'm a vicious wretch because I haven't. People with children are always so much holier-than-thou to those who haven't. They insist not only on the fun of having them, but on making the world unpleasant for the rest of us because we aren't sharing the fun. Isn't it a curious attitude?"

Fliss was decidedly more sophisticated.

"How's Cecily?"

"Busy—struggling with servants."

"Has she a lot of trouble?"

"Some. Of course we always have the faithful Ellen, but it isn't nearly enough."

"I remember Ellen," said Fliss.

"She's a regular member of the family now."

He ordered his lunch and Fliss, eating hers slowly so that he could catch up, contemplated him gravely.

"You haven't been in my house for six months," she said.

"My Lord, Cecily's baby's only three months old. We haven't been able to go about."

"I know, but sometimes you surely could. When you and Matthew got so tied up with that mining business last winter I supposed it meant seeing a lot more of you. Instead it's been less and less."

"Well, Cecily and I are going through the baby phase now."

"I know—but isn't it possible that you are overdoing it?" Dick flushed a little, and Fliss leapt over his embarrassment. "It's really bad for Cecily to be so tied down, you know."

"How can she help it?"

"She should help it for her own sake. Don't tell her I said so. It's impudent enough to say it to you. Cecily has come to think I'm anathema."

"What nonsense!"

"Truly. It began during war time. She couldn't take the things I was doing seriously. Well, some of them weren't too serious, but somebody had to do the cheering up! And now that the mess is all over she thinks we still ought to be long-faced. I won't! I think we're in for a good time. It isn't going to help any of the poor boys who got theirs to be gloomy now."

"How do you know?" asked Dick, teasingly, lighting his cigarette.

Fliss leaned on two unwrinkled elbows and looked at him. "Look here, Dick, if you'd been killed over there——"

"Instead of hanging around on this side nearly killing myself."

"Poor Dick! It was rotten luck. But it wasn't your fault they wouldn't send you over. Or maybe it was; you were too useful on this side. But listen! If you had gone over and been killed do you think your soul would still be hanging around glooming because a few people were trying to amuse themselves? You would not!"

"I would not!" grinned Dick cheerfully.

"That's what I told Cecily once. Cecily is in grave danger of getting too serious. With all those babies——"

"Don't over-count, now."

"Oh, Dick!" said Fliss, patting his hand ever so lightly with her slim glove. "Come on and play once in a while! You really mustn't drop us, Dick, even if I am frivolous. For Matthew's sake you ought to stand by. He considers you and Cecily the high spots in our whole list of friends."

"Oh, I see Matthew every day," protested Dick.

"I suppose you do, but Matthew doesn't see Cecily and he misses it when he doesn't. He says so. He likes to talk to her. I've always been jealous of her and rather glad you saw her first."

"Don't be foolish, Fliss."

"As you say. Well, it's been nice to see you. No, I must pay for my own lunch. It makes our lunching together so definitely respectable."

It ran through Dick's mind that afternoon at intervals that perhaps he and Cecily were getting a bit too domestic. He decided to take the matter up with her. There had been a time, immediately after his disappointing war service—a service which had kept him from going overseas because he was found to be immensely useful in training camps on his own side of the ocean—when Dick had felt like plunging into society a bit more deeply than he had ever done since his marriage; when the allurements of light talk and loose manners had been strong for a few months.

But the imminent coming of their third child had been announced and Cecily herself was too thoroughly out of sympathy with moods of lightness to even have him suggest that she join in them. She herself had been willing to make any necessary sacrifice during the war. She had waited, during the year and a half when the United States was at war, to see Dick go at any moment to France and to death. She had maintained herself in a continual state of sacrifice. The evils of the world and the crusading spirit had pressed upon her. That she had not been called upon for personal sacrifice did not mean that she could alter the attitude in which she was ready for sacrifice. And the seriousness of childbearing again had weighed her down. "Yes," thought Dick, "we're getting a bit heavy."

The impression lasted until he went into his house that

night and then he felt suddenly absurd. Upstairs he could hear the sounds of the babies being put to bed. Around him everything was orderly and still, waiting for him. It was comfortable and quiet and the sense of possession which so often came over him as he entered his home quite destroyed that vague feeling that he and Cecily weren't quite getting all they might be getting out of things. And a sense of shame at even this slight disloyalty to all she had done to make him happy put extra devotion into his greeting of her.

She came down the stairs a little abstractedly. In two years she seemed, like Fliss, to have changed little—very pretty, very young still—only where the magnetism of Fliss had increased, Cecily's had perhaps somewhat diminished. The constant day by day responsibility of caring for her babies had weighted her manner. Her mind was on the business of being a mother and a housekeeper—not on Dick, even when she kissed him.

"They are all quiet now," she said. "If you must go up, don't disturb them, will you?"

"No," he promised. "Did the new housemaid come?"

"Yes, she's here. I don't think she's going to be very good, though."

"Don't be critical, if she's just here."

Dick went past the nursery door, looking in to call to the two older children, then to Cecily's room to see the new baby, so pink and well-cared for in its bassinet. Finally he went to his own room. He felt a little lonesome and would have been amazed if he had analyzed his feelings far enough to know what it was that he felt. But that was it. He wanted to be singled out for attention, and all he was getting was general care.

Cecily and Ellen were in quiet conference when he went down. They were talking in the hall about the merits of the new housemaid. He gathered that they were very

disparaging and felt that their standards were over-high.

"I had lunch with Fliss Horton to-day—Fliss Allenby, I mean," he told Cecily when she faced him as usual over the pleasant table.

"Lunch with Fliss? How did that happen?"

"I ran into her at the Lennox Restaurant. The Club was crowded and I went there at noon. She was kicking about not seeing more of us. Rattled off a bunch of talk about this and that engagement she had for this week. Are we asked to the things that go on—the Harris's reception and this big dance Leonard Pollen is pulling off?"

"Of course we are. I don't bother to show you the cards because we decided that we couldn't do that sort of thing now."

"Fliss said that she thought we were getting too domestic."

"Fliss would think so."

"Did you and Fliss ever quarrel?"

"Why, no, Dick. Why?"

"I just wondered, after she called it to my attention, why we hadn't seen them in a long while. Not that I wanted to especially," he added unnecessarily.

"We haven't seen them for a long while. I miss Matthew, too. We used to have the finest talks. He had a way of making me think about things. I don't know why I haven't seen them, but I really haven't seen anybody. For a while you know I was a bit down—low in my spir-its, after——"

"Poor old Cecily. You certainly had every right."

"We mustn't, Dick. It doesn't sound as if we wanted the baby. I feel so guilty when I look at him to think I ever didn't. Well, when I was feeling like that I didn't want to see Fliss. She was so awfully gay—and so pretty and slim, you know. It used to irritate me. So

night and then he felt suddenly absurd. Upstairs he could hear the sounds of the babies being put to bed. Around him everything was orderly and still, waiting for him. It was comfortable and quiet and the sense of possession which so often came over him as he entered his home quite destroyed that vague feeling that he and Cecily weren't quite getting all they might be getting out of things. And a sense of shame at even this slight disloyalty to all she had done to make him happy put extra devotion into his greeting of her.

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went driving in the Warner's big car or in Dick's small one; they went to a moving picture or made a call on Dick's mother—but always with the need of getting home early to the baby—always with the fear that Cecily was getting overtired hanging over them. Even their pleasures, their diversions, were never carefree. There were times when Dick felt that nurses and doctors and precautions about health had surrounded them rather unpleasantly long. But any such thoughts were always suppressed by the feeling that it was immensely selfish to feel any personal repressions when he had three healthy children and Cecily had been through so much. Three babies in four years! He had come to know and abhor the tone in which people, especially women, made that statement.

His talk seemed to bother Cecily. She brought it up again later in the evening when they had come home from a ride in the country and were giving the children a final inspection for the night. Dorothea and Leslie, in their white cribs, sturdy little bodies outlined under the miniature coverlets, were very pleasant to look at. It was a rite with Cecily—this last look—a reward for all the care they caused her and a further prayer for their health and safety.

"Don't you think," she said softly, as she stood looking at them, "that they are much more important than all the fun we might have had playing like Fliss?"

"You can't compare two such dissimilar things," said Dick, and then knew immediately that his remark had been true, but inadequate.

"But you'd sooner have these?"

He became a little irritated that she should have to ask such a question. Merely asking it assumed that he was hankering after things that he was not even wanting—that he wasn't a devoted parent.

"Wouldn't you?" he countered, rather cruelly.

Cecily merely looked at him in high reproach.

Then, because he felt a little conscience-smitten at the fact that Cecily was hurt, he followed her into her room and played with the little baby, who had waked up for his supper. He was a very gay father and ordinarily Cecily loved this mood and joined him in it, but to-night he was wrapped in seriousness.

"Of course they'll be older soon, and then I can leave them to a nurse, but while I am still nursing the baby, I can't see how I can manage a lot of society."

"For Heaven's sake, Cecily, don't be so absurd. Who wants you to do society? I wouldn't let you if you wanted to. Who could be happier than I am just as I am?"

Cecily sighed. "I know you're happy," she said, "and I'm happy. But this thing that came up to-night isn't new. I hear it from other people—people who talk about my being 'tied down' and say I ought to enjoy myself while I'm young; people who say that they never see you about any more and talk about how you used to enjoy dancing and such things; women who say they don't intend to have babies. You've no idea how they talk."

"Haven't I? Don't I get the looks from the women who imply I'm some sort of monster because you have three children at your age?"

"I love the children. I couldn't not have them."

"Now, look here, Cecily, you're tired out to-night. The worry of that new maid and the change in the baby's feeding have left you flat. You just stop worrying about all this. We've been over it before, you know, lots of times, and we like our way of doing things. We may be a little out of fashion—we may not do things just as other people are doing them, but we are doing them the way we want to do them and that ought to satisfy us. I'm

absolutely with you and I'm not hankering after any gay society. I do think we ought to get out as much as we can—for your sake—but while these kids are small and with the damned lack of servants—or lack of damned servants—we'll just have to stay by the ship. And you mustn't worry."

All of which was very logical and straight. Only Cecily had developed a little taste for virtue and the praise of virtue and the fact that they had chosen their own way was not enough. She wanted to be reassured that they had chosen the higher and better way and Dick should not have qualified by saying that they should go out as much as possible. However, he had stated the case, and Cecily was reasonable enough to know it.

She lay awake rather late, pondering things—whether things weren't a bit unjust, since Fliss and her kind (she wanted to pin the problem down to Fliss somehow) had such a good time without responsibilities—what men liked in women and why Fliss looked so well in flame colored things—whether Matthew wanted children and wasn't secretly unhappy. Finally, catching herself in the midst of a picture of Fliss miserable in a childless old age while she herself—she laughed, proving that she had that sense of humor which her stepfather had questioned once, said aloud, "Can this be the fair Wendy?" and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

IT was Alumnæ Day at the convent. Alumnæ Day meant a half holiday for the students, frosted cakes for "gouter" at four o'clock, the formal rooms and study halls and dormitories extra well cleaned and polished, the Chapel sweet with the fragrance of garden flowers sent by some graduate, the nuns a little more hurried than usual, though always composed, their immaculate ruffs whiter, if possible, than ever. Alumnæ Day brought with it a reception for the graduates who came to inspect the convent and to be present at the awarding of the gold medal for Composition and the silver one for French Verse, always given in October to members of the graduating class and worn proudly throughout the year. Benediction was especially beautiful with the extra candles on the altar and Mother Barante's voice singing the "Tantum Ergo," and many a graduate, mentally scarred from some of her contacts with life, often a little heart-sick at the failure of her ideals or broken by some sorrow, eased herself in memories of the peace of her school-days. There was always a sale, too, of the handiwork of the girls and the money went to the support of the little charity school on the back of the convent grounds. Embroidered towels, pillow cases and such little luxuries were sold for ridiculously high sums and the graduates brought their friends to buy, too, and swell the fund for the charity school.

It was here that Cecily first met Fliss after the discussion with her husband and his rather disturbing lunch

at the Lennox. By tacit consent Cecily and Dick had abandoned the plan for a "little dinner and the Orpheum" for the time being, both feeling a little afraid to reopen the discussion on points which might prove sensitive.

Madeline had brought Fliss. Madeline had attached herself to Fliss after Cecily's comparative retirement and was quite one of the gayest people in that group which revolved around and with Mrs. Allenby. Agnes Harding was there—tall, plainly dressed, a rather affected expression of continual high nobility on her face. Agatha Ward, too, and she had changed more than the others. Agatha had stopped writing verses, finding a more fruitful field in short stories, and she had been markedly successful for so young a person. Her first novel was on the press now. She bore the notoriety which surrounded her and all its attendant praise with considerable grace, a trifle conscious of making literary sentences perhaps, but not unpleasantly so.

The old, severely furnished convent made an austere background for the reception. Its proof that luxury was unnecessary to aristocracy was never more incontestable than on this day when the black robed nuns in the bare corridors and study rooms received the deference of beauty and wealth. No matter how powerful a graduate had become, no matter what she had excelled in, when she returned to the convent it was not to shed glory on her former surroundings, but to pay a tribute to the convent itself. So they all felt.

The groups gathered in the parlors and on the long wooden porch which overlooked the orchard. Cecily and her old group drew together again, extremely interested in each other as they always were.

"I haven't seen you since we graduated, Cecily," said Agnes. "I visited in Carrington once or twice, but you

were always incapacitated. But I always try to make a point of coming for Alumnæ Day."

"I come to the convent rather often, but I haven't been to an Alumnæ Day before, since the first year."

"That's what it is to be a devoted mother. How are the children, Cecily?" asked Agatha.

"All very well; all very cunning."

"Darling things," said Madeline.

"But doesn't it seem funny to think of Cecily with three children?" persisted Agnes.

"It's very interesting," said Agatha. "I think I'll have to use you in a book, Cecily."

"Type of the domesticated woman?"

"Dear, no—nothing so trite. No one deals with types any more, anyhow. It's the vogue to be terrifically 'inner.' I'll have to study you."

"Don't waste your time. Study Agnes."

"I wouldn't be interesting to modern fiction," said Agnes, with some superiority. "I am a conservative, you know, and holding true to the things we learned in this dear old place."

"What do you think the rest of us are doing, I wonder? It isn't exactly immoral to write books or have babies, is it?"

"Or to be stupid?" put in Madeline. "Not to have any babies or any books—only a husband?"

"What I meant," said Agnes, "is that simple religious ideals have gone out of fashion."

"No, they're coming in again." Conscious that she was baiting Agnes a little, Agatha kept it up. "You'll soon be fashionable, Agnes."

"It's possible that I may, after all, decide to enter the convent."

That remark of Agnes did make a little ripple of excitement.

"Do you remember?" asked Cecily, looking about her, "the night we all sat in the parlor and discussed things? The night after the graduates' retreat. Whether we should marry or not? Isn't it funny that we are all doing just about what we thought we would do? Agatha writing, Madeline married and Agnes—I remember you said that if you really loved some one, Agnes, you'd marry. Now to enter——"

Agnes looked a little embarrassed and angry. "If I loved some one; but it is hard to find in these days a worthy person."

They all knew then that Agnes must have been disappointed and no one pursued the subject.

"I remember that Cecily refused to commit herself," said Agatha. "She didn't know what she wanted to do."

Cecily agreed a little dreamily, her eyes wandering off through the window.

"No, I didn't know much about anything. As for knowing what I wanted to do I wonder if it isn't all pretty much decided in advance for us; I wonder if we have much choice."

"Here's Mother Fénelon. Mother, Cecily has become a fatalist and Agnes is going to enter the convent."

Mother Fénelon smiled. "Agnes going to enter?" she questioned. "Oh, no, dear Agnes hasn't a vocation. She mustn't joke about such things. And why is Cecily a fatalist?"

"She says we haven't much choice in what happens to us."

The nun turned and looked at Cecily. Under the beauty of Cecily's face a kind of weariness showed for a moment, as she looked back into the eyes that reflected the peace of the cloister.

"Cecily was joking, too. You girls mustn't talk this way. You'll corrupt yourselves and each other."

Fliss joined the circle.

"Having a reunion?" she said, as Madeline introduced her. "I've been wandering around, wishing I'd been educated here instead of in a noisy co-educational High School. Maybe sometimes I could talk to my husband if I had been brought up here. Where have you been keeping yourself, Cecily? I told Dick the other day that it was ages since I'd seen you."

"He said he'd had lunch with you."

"I hope he didn't pretend he paid for my lunch."

"No," laughed Cecily. She always had a liking for Fliss when she saw her that her reason protested against. Every one liked to see Fliss around, especially with the new confidence which had replaced the impudence she had had before her marriage. "But he came home and told me that I didn't go out enough and that he'd had lunch with you. I felt very domestic and badly dressed."

"And I told Matthew that I had had lunch with Dick and he said, 'It would do me good to see Cecily once in a while,' and I felt pert and overdressed and ignorant."

"There's your story, Agatha," said Madeline. "Each of them intriguing the other's husband. Mismatched."

"Hush," said Mother Fénelon. "Madeline, even if you are married, I'll give you a penance if you talk like that."

"Give me the penance," begged Fliss, laughingly. "I started it and I've never had a penance. I never have had any one to expurgate my conversation."

"Will you have your tea now?" asked the nun.

They followed her, Fliss and Cecily together. The curious attraction, which was not always friendly, that they felt for each other—had always felt since that day when Cecily met Fliss—and which had been cemented at the birth of Dorothea, was rather stronger than ever, in spite of the way they had drifted into different camps.

It was as if each of them possessed something the other lacked or desired.

"It is a beautiful place," said Fliss. "I'm glad to see it, though it makes me feel, as I say, raw and ignorant."

"It shouldn't. It should just make you feel peaceful. That's what it tries to do."

"That's what it would do to me if I were its kind of person. It would make you feel peaceful. Isn't it funny? You don't really belong to it religiously and yet you fit in here much better than Madeline. You're like the place. Matthew would explain that all in high sounding terms. I can't explain it, but I do feel it."

Cecily appreciated the half thought-out compliment. "The convent means a great deal to girls who were brought up here."

"Did you have to study hard?"

"Not too hard. Have you seen where we studied?"

She took Fliss through the study halls, through the garden, down to the refectory and the winter playroom.

"It's so different," was Fliss's comment. "Of course I liked the old High, and I had a corking time there. And I suppose it was pretty dull here with no boys, but it did make—ladies of you all."

"Perhaps it didn't make us very wise."

"No, I know a lot more than you do about ways to get what I want. I think I know more about handling men than you do. But then you seem to get them without handling."

That struck Cecily as a bit coarse and Fliss knew it. So she acknowledged it.

"That sounds rather coarse, doesn't it? But most things outside of this enclosure are a bit coarse, I think."

"They needn't be," said Cecily.

"I wonder. I wonder if most people aren't a little too coarse grained to like a place like this."

They were talking of the convent, but Cecily felt an implied criticism of herself.

"Most people prefer High Schools, you think."

"Most people are the High School type now—talk a lot and pretty freely. Wasn't it funny to see how shocked the nun got at Madeline? And Madeline wasn't saying a circumstance to most of what you hear. Most people are a little broad and most women pretty used to having men around, knowing a lot of them easily and being friendly and a bit flirtatious."

Was she warning her, thought Cecily? Her pride rose against such a warning.

"Yet there are men who don't like that sort of women," she answered, a faint edge of hauteur in her voice.

Then to make up for that remark she asked Fliss if she couldn't come home for dinner.

"We've a temporary supply of servants and plenty of dinner. Can't you telephone Matthew?"

"We'll stop for him," said Fliss, "if you can drive home with me. Are you in your own car?"

"No, mother dropped me here; my own car's laid up."

That was glorious for Fliss. This time it was her car that took Cecily home. It was a Fliss-like car—lean and low and yellow-brown. They piled into it and went down town, people turning to watch them, Fliss skimming through the streets, letting other drivers save her life and get out of her way because she was a pretty woman in a handsome car.

Matthew seemed delighted. Cecily was struck by the fact that he looked younger, laughed more easily, was not quite so inclined to heaviness in conversation. They dropped Madeline at her house and went on to surprise Dick and please him too.

Cecily had telephoned Ellen, who had a ready half-familiar smile for Fliss. Fliss returned it a bit quizzically. She even dared, while Cecily was busy with the baby, to slip out into the pantry where Ellen was working.

"How's your ma?" asked Ellen promptly.

"Fine. I dropped in on her last week just after I'd made her buy some new window curtains and found her tying them all up with loops of blue ribbon. She and dad are attending movie serials."

"Is everything all right with you at your house?"

"Slick. I wish you'd come and live with me, now, Ellen. I'd make you my housekeeper and after a bit I'd like to tell Cecily you're a cousin of mine. This seems so queer."

"Better not. No, I won't leave Mrs. Harrison. Help's hard to get. She counts on me, and I love the babies."

"Good old Ellen."

"Not a bit. I like it here. It's very homey."

"Don't you think my house would be homey?"

Ellen looked at her dubiously and let that pass.

"Well, if you prefer the highly charged domesticity of this place to me and my Matthew, it's up to you."

Dick came out, seeking cocktails.

"I'm getting a drink and flirting with Ellen," said Fliss.

"You're probably trying to get Ellen away from us," laughed Dick, "but I warn you that she won't go. It's been tried."

It was only natural that Ellen should take an interest in the table conversation. She answered the bell herself, for the housemaid had cut her hand a few days before and, deliberately or otherwise, was retaining her clumsy bandages. It was obvious even to a listener so utterly untrained as Ellen that the old free give-and-take of the quartet was gone. They laughed just as much, gossiped as interestedly and haggled over their bits of philosophy

as eagerly. Yet one could see that in these bits of philosophy, especially when they touched or seemed to touch upon habits of living, Cecily seemed to make an appeal to Matthew and Fliss to Dick. Ellen was very thoughtful as she washed her dishes, which the housemaid dried superciliously.

"Isn't that Mrs. Allenby the prettiest thing you ever saw?" asked the housemaid.

"Not as pretty as Mrs. Harrison," said Ellen, "but she's very nice looking."

"Well, Mrs. Harrison has looks all right—style, too, in a way, by which I mean she has nice things and expensive things—but to my way of thinking," expounded Jenny, "she's not in it with Mrs. Allenby for real class. Now, Mrs. Allenby knows how to dress. She's an awful swell too. My goodness, you see her name everywhere. She's the very center of that Country Club set." Jenny had waited on table at the Country Club during the summer months and made fine distinctions.

"The men," she went on, not at all disturbed by Ellen's silence, "just flock around her. She livens things up so. Why, just think of the way she livened up that dining-room to-night. She knows how to put some pep into things. Everybody's crazy about her. I wonder she can put up with a stupid little home dinner like this."

Ellen chuckled at the marvelous reversals of standards.

"Oh, I don't know," she said, with a fairly good imitation of sarcasm, "maybe she wasn't used to much before she married."

Jenny cocked an elbow. "Used to much? That girl's been a *débutante*, you can just be sure of that. She's got a real aristocratic manner. You don't appreciate standards like that, being from the country yourself, but to a town girl there's no mistaking."

"Don't bang those cups."

"Good Heavens, any one would think they were yours," said Jenny. "I wouldn't spend my life worrying about other people's cups—or bothering about their kids either. You're a fool, Ellen, and you'll never get anywhere. Of course I don't know what Mrs. Harrison pays you (this lack of confidence was a rankling thing), but if it's a cent less than sixty-five you're stung!"

"No!" said Ellen, who was banking seventy-five dollars a month.

"Yes, ma'am!" said Jenny, and banged another cup.

The Victrola started in the living-room, playing dance music. Jenny jazzed a bit.

"Lord, why don't they play it when they're alone?"

CHAPTER XIV

CECILY started on a fairly determined round of gayety for a few weeks. She found it interesting at first and a little boring afterwards. It was very difficult for her to take or even pretend to take casual interest in people, and casual interest was all that society wanted of her. She was beautiful and had a charming manner. So much every one admitted. But she was a married woman with three children and the faint flavor of mystery which had made her so alluring before she had been married had gone. Of course she would consciously seek to charm no one, and her unconscious charm so definitely belonged to Dick Harrison that there was not much left for other men. She was not an invigorating presence or a stimulating companion unless she was really stirred to interest, and the net result was that Cecily found herself bored fairly often.

Dick was not. He could still amuse himself greatly with a pretty girl, because she was pretty; he enjoyed dancing and being foolish. Unlike Cecily he did not always carry depths around with him. Cecily had to fit play into a scheme of life or she could not enjoy it. Dick just played. He appreciated that Cecily went about to please him, thanked her for it, always told her and always sincerely thought that she was the loveliest woman in any group and proceeded to have a good time. It was not quite subtle enough for Cecily.

In the society into which she was thrown there was no one who marked the course of her development with in-

terest. There were plenty of spectacular women doing interesting things, paradoxical things, and they saw in Cecily only passivity. The very domestic women who liked to talk babies and husbands rather intimately and eternally found her a little aloof and reserved; and those of a gayer, hedonistic type thought her overserious. She was an individual in an age in which individuality has to be advertised and she had not the faintest ability or desire to advertise herself.

Older men and women said that she was a "good wife and mother"; women of her own age said she was "hard to get to know"; the younger girls said, like Jenny, "beautiful, but without pep." So she was a little lonely.

Being uninterested, she saw many things of which she disapproved. Her early training had been all towards a fastidiousness of manner and a perhaps exaggerated modesty, so that it hurt her to see the manners of the girls and women. They were greedy for notice, in politics and on the dance floor; they were unreserved in thought and noisy in manner. Ugly—ugly in thought and manner—she found them often. It was partly the forced seclusion of her life, during the periods before and after her children's births, that had kept her from any understanding of the reasons underlying the lack of stability and absence of dignity which bothered her so much. She had gone through war worries, borne war problems, but she had not known the terrors or horrors of war at first hand or through those dear to her. She had maintained her standards in her seclusion; and she could not see that some of this noise had been deliberately begun to silence the thoughts of those who had seen standards overthrown and trodden upon; who had seen them scorned, doubted, analyzed away.

Of course she was told that, but it did not make her more lenient. She could not condone the spirit of those

she saw around her or see its relation to the spirit of exaltation into which the war had been popularly preached. It bothered her that girls were not more delicate; it bothered her that married women did not seem to appreciate the possible joy in a husband and in having children; she heard remarks that seemed to her to prove that the world was on its way to corruption.

The criticism which she felt of things around showed in her attitude towards her stepbrothers. They were in college now, boys of nineteen and twenty. Walter, the older boy, was extremely handsome; Gerald not so handsome, but even more spirited than his brother. Mr. Warner's attitude towards his sons was to let them do pretty much what they would while they were finding themselves. To his wife and Cecily it seemed a very dangerous policy.

"It's not as if the atmosphere of society itself were wholesome," said Mrs. Warner, discussing with her husband the matter of further increasing Walter's allowance. "It isn't just gayety and frivolity. There's something dangerous in the air. No one has any repose."

"Except Cecily."

"Cecily has it and the fact that she stands out sometimes as almost prudish shows what we are coming to."

Her sons had brought Mrs. Warner almost to the point of developing and acknowledging a philosophy. Not quite. She, like her daughter, was still somewhat negative.

"Well, shall we give Walter that extra hundred?" asked her husband.

"He hasn't said why he needs it. What do you suppose he does with it? Gambling or some woman?"

"I don't think so. You might talk to him, dear. As far as I can make out it's just that girls and clothes are expensive. It costs an appalling amount to take a girl to a Prom."

"Any special girl?"

"I think he likes a girl in Philadelphia."

But when Walter came for Christmas a few weeks later and they sounded him about the girl from Philadelphia he looked astonished.

"Oh, her—no, I haven't seen her lately. Good reason, too, hey, Gerald?"

They burst into confidential chuckles and told nothing more.

Both boys had always been extremely fond of Cecily, even though she had been away from home so much that the children had not been much together, and Cecily was five years older than Walter. But they were proud of her and had a very good time with Dick. Cecily was equally proud of them, but they, too, worried her.

The two weeks before Christmas brought with them an unceasing round of parties, dances of one kind and another. Cecily was tired before it began. She nearly suggested that they should decline all Christmas holiday entertaining, but neither Dick nor the boys gave her any chance for that. So she shopped for the children and made preparations all day for Christmas at home, and in the evening her only rest came while she leaned back against the cushions of the car as they drove to some club, house or hotel to dance and be gay for hours. When she got there she usually found her brothers there, too, for Carrington society was small enough to include all the possible young men from eighteen to thirty-five at its functions. Walter would be dancing with some pretty girl, held caressingly close in his arms, flirting furiously. Gerald might be dancing or he might be standing on the side lines looking debonairly on, or worse yet, already adjourned to some dark corner with a girl. It obsessed Cecily. She could not let them alone. She wanted them to be reserved, dignified even, in their gayety and they

were not. To-morrow she knew they would tell hilarious tales to each other about the very girls they were flirting so scandalously with.

Gerald, bending over her, "It's my dance, Cecily."

She felt herself horrified at the very way he held her. "Don't dance so close," she protested. Then, "Who was that girl you were dancing with?"

"Helen Ramsay—pretty fluffy chicken, isn't she?"

"You shouldn't talk that way."

"That's what she is."

"Gerald, haven't you any respect for women—for yourself—that you can cheapen yourself so?"

"Where do you get that stuff, Cecily?"

Gerald's intolerance hurt. The situation grew out of all proportions for Cecily. Gerald was being corrupted. He must be taken out of this. He must be reasoned with, shown that he was making himself cheap.

But he did not take to the reasoning kindly.

"What's the matter with all of you? Mother rowing because I'm a few hundred dollars short; dozens of fellows are a few thousands; and now you making a male vamp out of me. What do you want me to do? Study for the ministry and wear blinders so I can't see the girls?"

"I hate to see you with such stupid, inconsequent girls. That's what bothers me. I hate to see you get flippant"—she stumbled in her speech—"valuing love lightly."

"Lord, I'm not in love with the little Ramsay, if that's what's on your mind."

"I know you're not. Why play at it?"

"Fun!" said Gerald.

He left her and Cecily sat thinking of his last word and how she had come to hate it. It typified all the cheapness she despised. It amazed her to see how, during

these few weeks of semi-unwilling participation in "fun" she had come to formulate a philosophy which definitely excluded it. Where she had been indifferent, she was now condemnatory.

From where she sat on the veranda she could see the ballroom. Dick was looking for her, Walter was dancing, not with a girl his own age, but with Fliss. Fliss was dancing just as Helen Ramsay had danced, close up to Walter, head against his shoulder, and Walter was talking to her in admiration. That was clear. An unaccustomed anger rose in Cecily. Her bodily weariness and her spasm of anger left her faint. As she turned, shuddering a little, she saw Matthew.

"Aren't you well?"

"Tired—could you slip out and take me home?"

But, once in his big car he did not take her home, a matter of a dozen blocks. Instead he turned to the road which circled the boulevards.

"Hush," he said, at her protest. "I told Dick that you were too tired to dance and that I was going to take you for a ride. It's all fixed. I'll be back there long before Fliss is ready to go. And I've not had a chance to talk to you for ages."

But they did not talk much. They watched the city below them, spreading so big, a thousand lights coming from places of comedy and tragedy all intermingled. Once she roused herself out of her relaxation to tell him how peaceful she felt. He merely nodded.

High over the city he stopped on the very crest of the hills and shut off the motor. The place was black and silent and isolated. Stars hung close and the city looked small and remote.

"How infinitesimal it all is—all the fuss down there," said Cecily.

"Of course you'd feel that," said Matthew, lighting a

cigarette. "That's why I brought you up. It'll do you good. You mustn't let things as small as that eat you up, Cecily."

"What do you mean?"

"Don't let things bother you. Nothing matters an awful lot."

"Life matters. So Mother Fénelon said once."

"Perhaps it does—perhaps she's right. But only in the large. Certainly little habits of life don't."

"It's easy to feel that way up here, but down in the midst of those lights you can't get the sweep of things. Little things irritate—habits of life do matter."

"You ought to get away by yourself more. When I feel irritated I go up to my rooms and read what a lot of my betters, long dead, had to say and had to think."

"Can't be done by the mother of three."

"I question that. The mother of three would certainly profit. I hate to see you all harassed. It isn't right. Since the first day I saw you it's always been a satisfaction to me just to think of you—even when I didn't see you—as being calm and peaceful and beautiful. You mustn't lose those things."

"I wonder if I ever was calm and peaceful, passing up the other exaggeration. Now I nag at myself. I don't know when it began."

"Anything special on your mind, or just the accumulation of domestic duties?"

"I hate it," cried Cecily suddenly, with a passion quite unlike her. "I hate the way people are living. I can't make it out—anything out. If the principle they taught me that marriage is an institution for the home, for the bringing up of children is right, then all this—this fun—is wrong. You can't have what they call 'fun' and be a good woman. You can't play at making love with all this dancing that is only embracing—with all this loose

talk—and keep your feeling for your husband or wife clean. And if you don't you're stupid or a bore—out of date. I know what people think of me. Women have actually told me that I'm foolish to have three children; that I shouldn't let my household submerge me; that Dick is bound to crave 'fun'! He does like it; he's happier when we are going out places all the time; he makes himself cheap with these silly women; he uses the words he used to me when he talks to *them*—oh, that seems trivial, doesn't it?"

"No, no, not trivial! Don't talk any more, Cecily. You'll regret it if you do. I'm going to drive on. I'm afraid, a little, that you are battering yourself against a real difficulty, against things which can't be obviated. I want to think about it. See if I can't explain some things to you later. But it's hard to have to explain things when I am so sorry, Cecily, that I lose my philosophy."

"Don't bother, Matthew. I guess perhaps I'm just tired and a little jealous."

"No. You are tired and a little jealous, too, but it's deeper than that. You've been slipped into an age that doesn't fit you and instead of making things better for you by hardening you young they preserved your quality to your own—no, not destruction. It mustn't be that."

He didn't say any more. Nor let her talk.

"Hush. Now you are to rest. There's nothing to worry about. Think of those nice healthy babies that ought to make you eternally grateful to your fate. Three of them to bring up. That gives you a reason to straighten out all these problems—so you can help them. But you can't straighten them out by fretting."

"Or by bothering you." Her face, against the dark fur collar of her cloak, and dimly visible in the night, was very beautiful as Matthew turned to her.

"You couldn't bother me. I care for you," said Mat-

thew with restraint and yet conviction. "I care for you more than any other single thing in life. And," he went on quickly, warned by her little gasp, "there's not the faintest disloyalty to Fliss or jealousy of Dick involved. It's a different kind of feeling than any one else gives or could give you."

Cecily's slim arms, outlined under her wrap as she clasped her hands in sudden fear, relaxed again. "You're beautiful, Matthew."

He left her at her door and went back to find Fliss. The ballroom was very hot by this time. On the faces of the men perspiration or pallor showed that even they were beginning to feel the strain of five hours' dancing. The circles under the eyes of the women showed the weariness which their rouge could not hide. But, tired though they might be physically, relaxation seemed the last thing in any one's mind. The music was gayer, encores more frequent, the laughter was keyed higher, the abandon of dancing greater than before.

The men were cutting in on the dances of other men, women slipping from the arms of one man to those of another. Indefatigable. Fliss was wonderfully vivid. She never became disarranged when she danced. The bit of color that was his wife caught Matthew's eye and held it. She waved at him, nodding to him to come in and claim her. But he shook his head. He wanted to see Dick first. Dick was talking to Gerald by the wall. They were quite uproarious over something. Matthew joined them.

"Cecily get home?" asked Dick. "Already?"

"We went for a ride around the boulevards first; she seemed pretty tired."

"She is tired," said Dick. "It's too bad. With the babies and the maids and Christmas."

"It's making her cross," said Gerald. "She called me down to-night. Didn't like the way I was dancing."

"Cecily really doesn't care for going out much. She doesn't like all the jazz stuff." Dick's smile was one of tolerance as he said it.

"Well, I wouldn't let Cecily get to be a prig." Gerald was, in intention, very worldly and broadminded.

"Oh, she's not that," said Dick.

"Not at all that!" Matthew interrupted. "Cecily is vastly superior to all this rabble and their doings. Do you really like this stuff yourself, Dick?"

"It's sort of fun, but I'm off it for to-night. That's sure. No, I'm going to have one more foxtrot with Fliss. She's showing me how to get in an extra step."

He stole Fliss from her partner. Matthew was alone again.

"Have a good time, Fliss?" asked her husband, unlocking their front door.

"Lots of fun," said Fliss.

He looked at her crossly. "What in hell is fun, anyway?"

"Poor Matthew. You'll never know. It's a gift. You're born with it, or you never get it."

CHAPTER XV

DICK, a little under-slept, a trifle red about the eyes, was shaving. He knew he was late for breakfast and that that would bother Cecily. He knew the mechanism of his house ought not to be disturbed when the comfort and routine of the children depended on it. He did not feel quite fit for work and the hang-over of dance tunes persisted in his head. Moreover it was the first time that he and Cecily had not come home together from a party and while the arrangement was perfectly amicable at the time it was made with Matthew, it did seem a trifle irregular this morning. Dick hurried and it made him cross.

Cecily hurried him at breakfast, too. She wanted to go over lists of Christmas presents with him, to plan the trimming of the tree. Christmas was day after tomorrow. She did not refer to the night before. He wondered with some irritation whether that was deliberate, and forced the opening of the subject.

"Did you have a good ride last night?"

"Wonderful. It rested me ever so much. I slept hard."

"I hope," said Dick, "that you'll try to keep a bit more fit. You ought to be in good enough condition to stand a few hours' dancing. Don't you think you need a tonic, perhaps?"

It seemed very much off the point to Cecily. "I'd hate to have to take medicine so I could get myself to the point of dancing all night. Hardly worth while, is it?"

"I'm not sure it isn't."

She let that pass, and merely sat there answerless, looking hurt and cold. Dick got up.

"I'll meet you down town and we'll finish our shopping. Five o'clock at my office."

"That's fine."

He kissed her, wishing that she did not look so virtuous and hurt, that she would fly at him, get in the wrong somehow, and went out of the house whistling the tunes he had carried over from the night before. Cecily, conscious of a hundred things to do, sat still, and Ellen, passing through the room, looked at her commiseratingly.

"Tired after last night, Mrs. Harrison?"

"A little. Everybody's much gayer than I am, Ellen. No one else seems to get tired."

"They don't all have three children and go to dances."

"Don't they? I wonder how they manage. Ellen, I'm going to have every one here to-morrow night for the tree—Mrs. Harrison, my mother and father, Mr. Gerald and Mr. Walter. Then we will carry the children down after the tree is lit."

"Won't it be lovely?"

Dorothea ran in, clamoring. The business of the day pressed on Cecily. She lost her over-serious mood of the night before, a little ashamed, as Matthew had understood she would be, that she had let her half-grown thoughts out so freely. Well, Matthew was not like other people.

By the time she met Dick her day of activity had put her troubles into the background. She dressed rather carefully to go shopping with him and in her soft gray fur coat and hat, with a sprig of holly in her muff, she looked like an illustration for some Christmas story. Dick appreciated that. He was always proud of her. They sent the car on to meet them at the confectioner's, and walked through the sparkling streets, gazing into

windows. In the toyshops they were madly extravagant, though Cecily kept insisting that all the possible toys for the children were already bought.

"They'll smash and then they'll have these," said Dick. "These are my own contribution to the Christmas wreckage."

He took her to the jeweler's while he bought presents for his mother and hers, cigarette cases for the boys and was furtively given a package which he did not show her. Then to a florist's where he supplemented the holly with a great bunch of violets. They were so happy, so young and handsome that many a man and woman turned to look at them in admiration and envy. And the snow covered streets, the street lights and sparkling windows, the faces of happy people passing, all the setting made Dick and Cecily feel a magic in the air.

In the car Dick turned Cecily's face up to his and kissed her, as he had not kissed her lately—without any savor of duty or habit.

"Quite as if you wanted to," said Cecily breathlessly.

"Quite," laughed Dick. "I always want to, but I'm a bit afraid of hurting you or you are busy with the children or have your mind on something else. To-night you seem so particularly mine."

They had come upon a mood which was the breath of life to Cecily—exalted, joyous, without a note of ribaldry. Dick could share those moods at times, but he did not live for them as did Cecily. She went about the next day in a happy blur of excitement. The house was full of the smell of Christmas baking and Ellen's face, steamed and red, fairly shone with pride as she loaded the shelf in the butler's pantry with the things she was making. Dorothea was full of excited baby questions. The tree was brought in and stood in a corner of the living-room which seemed particularly made for it. The fireplace

had a Christmas log, thick and round. Presents were delivered. Expressmen brought packages. The postman left dozens of Christmas cards. The glitter, the greeting of the holiday season permeated the house. Dick was like a boy, stealing up to his room to hide still more extravagances. And by evening, after the tree was ready to light and Dorothea was in a wild palpitation about staying up after seven o'clock, the Christmas charm had reached its height. Mrs. Harrison came early. Her chauffeur brought her basket of packages to the door and the dainty, aristocratic little lady came in, all aglow herself with the excitement of spending a Christmas eve where there were children. Mrs. Harrison was very fond of Cecily and loved to enjoy herself with unsuitable indulgences for the children, which because she was a lady who thought in terms of material things, meant embroidered dresses and superfluous bonnets.

Mrs. Warner was there, looking as beautiful as only she could look, and Mr. Warner's pockets were bulging with white packages, his arms laden with mechanical toys, already almost destroyed because he and his sons had been trying them out at home. The two young men were there, carrying on systematic "jollyng" of Ellen, who adored it and them as only an old maidservant can enjoy the notice of the young men in the family. They gathered in the breakfast-room and then marched to the living-room, even Mrs. Harrison entering into the spirit of the procession. Dorothea whooped with joy, the elder baby blinked at the candles and waved an incoherent hand at them all and Dick began delivering the presents.

Cecily, whose household budget was always leaving her in financial straits, found herself in delighted possession of a thousand-dollar check from her stepfather because "she had been a good girl." She had no way of realizing then how much that money of her own would mean to

her later. They joked a good deal about how she would spend it. Dick gave her a slim platinum bracelet, slipping it on her arm himself, calling it his "handcuff." There was a deluge of tissue paper as the dozens of gifts were unwrapped. Then they all focused on Dorothea, somewhat dazed and bewildered by the onpouring of new things to amuse her. Mr. Warner set a mechanical duck, a toy train and a self-starting toy automobile in uncanny procession across the room, Gerald tooted the horns, and Dick started to build a toy house out of blocks which were far too complicated for the children to handle. Cecily sat on the floor and watched him and Mrs. Warner watched them both as she talked inconsequences with Dick's mother. Ellen had retreated to the kitchen, full of grateful embarrassment because she had been given a fur piece that amazed her and she poured dandelion wine and cut the richest fruitcakes recklessly, for Jenny, of course, was out at a "swell dance" somewhere or other. The nurse took Dorothea to bed. The tissue paper was collected and the dandelion wine drunk with much jesting. Cecily was sitting with her head against Dick's arm when the door bell rang and Matthew and Fliss came in.

"Do you mind?" asked Matthew. "Our house is celebrating Christmas by six dollar holly wreaths in the windows, but we've no excuse for a tree."

A warm, treacherous little sense of virtue rose in Cecily. She was immensely cordial to them both. She wanted them to see the tree, taste the warm spicy atmosphere of her home on Christmas, see the toys that meant plenty of children. She wanted Matthew to enjoy it all. She wanted Fliss to see it all.

But it worked out a little differently. Perhaps Gerald and Walter began it. They had been gay all evening, but they were gayer with the advent of Fliss. They insisted on making her presents, giving her cigarette cases

and cuff links so that she wouldn't feel neglected and putting one of the baby's fat dolls on the heap of nonsense they laid at her feet. They plied her with dandelion wine and Fliss, taking just a cordial glass more than the other ladies had, proceeded to make herself interesting. Under Cecily's influence the evening would have mellowed, changed from gayety to soft quiet and seriousness. Under Fliss's influence gayety mounted higher and higher. It was Fliss who dominated. It was Fliss who got them all into gales of laughter by her tales of her Christmas shopping for Matthew, Fliss who started the competition to see who could blow the candles on the tree out at longest range, Fliss who started a sophisticated little gossip with Mrs. Harrison about the latest and most fascinating scandal, and finally Fliss who offered to show Dick again just how that dance step was managed.

"Sorry I can't demonstrate here," she said.

"Sure you can. Here, roll up the corner of the rug," suggested Dick.

There was a Christmas carol on the Victrola. Cecily watched them whisk it off and change it to a dance tune—watched them wrecking the Christmas scene that she had planned and loved.

"Why dance to-night?" she protested, trying to be jocular about it all and succeeding so poorly that every one turned to look at her. There was an undercurrent of angry pain in her voice.

Walter came over pulling her to her feet by both hands.

"Now, don't be a crab, Cecily. You're getting too old for your age. Let's have some fun."

He whirled her into an absurd dance and when he had finished she was laughing in earnest. But she went over to the sofa on which her mother sat and dropped down beside her.

"It wasn't the kind of evening I'd planned," she said in an undertone.

Mrs. Warner looked at the boys and Fliss and Dick, all grown so uproarious, at her own husband smoking in placid enjoyment as he and Matthew talked politics.

"But there's no harm in it, and you can't dictate in your own house."

"There is harm in it," said Cecily, her voice tight and hard. "There is harm in it."

She stayed there a little longer and then slipped from the room. Upstairs beside her window she stood with her hands pressed to her head as if to still the torrent of painful thought that raged through it. The front of her mind seemed trying to reassure the back of it, she thought—the front persisting that as her mother said "there was no harm"—the back protesting against a violation of ideals and sanctities and against cheapness and frivolity. She did not know how long she stood there, how long it was before she heard Dick's step in the doorway. At the look on his face she knew that he was conscious of no wrong—he was puzzled and a little angry.

"Your mother sent me to find you. Is anything wrong? Aren't you well?"

The impossibility of putting her grievance, her torture, so real the moment before, into words confronted her.

"I'm quite all right." And then, irrepressibly: "Only I don't see why they should act so ribald on Christmas eve."

Dick's face grew hard; a new disagreeable little glint was in his eyes.

"I really can't see what has come over you, Cecily—why you object to every bit of fun you see around you. You want to run things your own way absolutely—allow no one else to enjoy things that you won't or can't

enjoy. I don't think you're a good hostess or a good sport, sulking off up here by yourself."

He went out and left her fairly stricken with horror, wanting to call him back, wanting to scream, cry, wake up—do anything to undo the fact that he had spoken to her like that on Christmas eve, that the glamour of the day before had been torn across already. Instincts of control struggled for the mastery of her hysteria. And control won. Over her knowledge that the sacredness of Christmas, the sacredness of love was stained and hurt irrevocably, with the memory of that cruel light in Dick's eyes making her almost dizzy, suddenly aware that Dick was not carelessly disregarding her wishes, but deliberately doing so—she went downstairs. It was very trivial, yet nothing could ever hurt Cecily quite as much again. She would never be quite so unprotected again. In those few moments she had learned the art of concealing pain and going on with things.

Dick thought she was fine. His little fit of anger had spent itself and he was sorry, and genuinely glad that Cecily had come to herself. Inwardly he put it down to the old excuse that she was "tired" and then forgot. For they were all very gay, gayer than ever now that Cecily had really joined in. In the dancing the Christmas tree fell a little awry and had to be propped up with a chair.

It struck midnight. Christmas had come in, unheralded. Matthew spoke, suddenly grave:

"We're going now, Fliss. This is Christmas, and it's a holy-day with lots of people. Come."

They all said good night and Dick and Cecily were left alone in the disordered room. Some sense of Cecily's grievance must have come to Dick as he looked about.

"Come to bed, dear. We'll straighten this mess up in the morning."

"In a minute. You go on."

He went up and she moved about, arranging and ordering, her brows knit. When she had finished it did not look so different from the way it had looked early in the evening. But she regarded it without emotion. She was doing this for the children and for their self-respect—not for joy. Then she turned out the lights and the room was soft in the light of the dying fire. The tinsel on the tree sparkled. She went upstairs.

Dick was in her room, trying to restore everything, wipe out those few angry words. Cecily was conscious as he talked on, mostly about the children and their enjoyment, that she was making things difficult. She was not responsive, and she knew he felt it. The little glint had gone from his eyes. They were honest and tender now. But, she thought, that other expression lies back of them—just back of them.

Then she was sorry. He was hurt as she turned a little from his kiss. She felt old, maternal, conscious that she could not tell him what he had done, how he had hurt her. Perhaps men were like that; perhaps things did not matter so much to them. She could not tell him. She did not want to hurt him. Gently she kissed him.

"Merry Christmas, darling," said Dick.

CHAPTER XVI

IN January Cecily found her hands extremely full. Ellen had an unexpected call to take care of a sick relative—she did not tell Cecily that it was Mrs. Horton—on whom tragedy in the form of cancer had descended. She would not consent to an operation and Ellen's duty was partly to take care of her, partly to reassure her, partly to keep her from answering patent medicine advertisements which "guaranteed to cure without the use of a knife." Mr. Horton had come for Ellen, not daring to risk the telephone in his wife's presence and at sight of the helplessness of the sagged figure at the kitchen door Ellen was bound to help. She said she would come for a month and by that time they could find a nurse. It was obvious enough that the sick woman was more important than Cecily's household, but Ellen was none the less distressed. She left a sour-faced Swedish woman and an increasingly pert Jenny to take care of the Harrisons and went on her errand of mercy, pulled backward and forward. Cecily had tried to be as kind as possible, but she had urged Ellen to come back as soon as she could.

"After a bit no doubt they'll get a nurse," said Ellen. "It's just at the start that a relation is easiest for the poor woman."

"Can they afford a nurse?" asked Cecily.

"There's a rich daughter."

"Then why doesn't she take care——"

"She couldn't. She's young and I suppose her husband needs her."

Fliss had indeed offered to do everything except give personal care to her mother. Matthew was the only person to whom she could give personal service, and even for him there was not too much, but she had arranged for specialists to examine and recommend; she had tried to make her mother have a trained nurse; tried everything that money could buy. That she shrank from the sight and thought of the corruption of the body was only that she was Fliss.

Matthew had been told of the identity of Ellen as her cousin, with one slight change in the facts. It was Ellen's proud request that the relationship be kept from the Harrisons, according to Fliss. So he was not surprised to see Ellen take up her place in the Horton household. Matthew was far more appreciative of and able to understand Fliss's parents than she was herself. Ordinary people with cramped minds and petty satisfactions were not out of the range of his philosophy as they were with her. He did not see the Hortons often, but once in a while he and Fliss went there for an evening or Fliss invited them to her house and undoubtedly the event, mostly taken up with small gossip and cribbage playing, did not irritate him as it did his wife.

Now that Mrs. Horton had taken to her bed, or at least to her tawdry kimonos, driven by fear and indigestible patent medicines as well as by the progress of the disease, the flat she called home had become an even more unattractive place. Ellen found unwashed dishes in every corner of the cupboard, under the gas stove, in the icebox; dirty linen; everything neglected, everything uncomfortable and in the midst of it the whining, terrified women and the unquestioning, drearily patient man. She tried to cheer them up and managed at least to make them comfortable. But it was far from easy or satisfying.

Coming in the day after Ellen had taken charge, Fliss praised her extravagantly.

"I don't see what we could have done if you hadn't come; she wouldn't have a nurse though I begged and begged."

"Well, that's natural," said Ellen. "Nurses frighten people who aren't used to them. I don't know as I blame her, but she ought to do as the doctor says."

"The doctor says that things are already pretty far advanced. He can't be sure that even an operation——" Fliss shuddered miserably. "Oh, Ellen, why don't they find a way to cure it?"

Ellen patted her on the shoulder. "Trust in the Lord, my dear," was all she said.

Fliss went in from the kitchen to see her mother who looked at her with the apathetic misery that had characterized her of late.

"Feeling better, mother?"

"I'll never be better. They as much as tell me that. I'm going to die, especially if they get their knives on me."

"Don't be silly, mother. You know they just want to help. Matthew got the best doctors. If you'd just let them operate."

"That's it! Every one after me wanting to see them cut into me. I've heard of those doctors before, thank you. Mrs. Todd came in to see me yesterday and she said to me: 'Mrs. Horton, don't you let those doctors experiment on you.' She told me some things that were terrible. And she told me, too, about a new thing they're getting out that has helped lots of women—just a kind of tonic that they say makes the trouble disappear in two months."

"That's just quack stuff. You know that. If there were any such thing the good doctors would be using it."

Mrs. Horton laughed, the high querulous laugh of the

invalid who has already become suspicious and opinionated.

"I know what I know, Flissy. All those high-toned doctors want to do is to experiment on me and get Matthew's money. I know them. You don't let yourself get taken in by them."

Fliss sat still watching her mother as she lay on the couch, a sodden heap of misery that would make no constructive effort. She looked baffled. Then she rose and unpacked the luxuries which she had brought with her: choice food, invalid comforts, a black satin negligee.

"Black!" shrilled the mother. "I'm not dead yet, thank you! Take it away, Flissy. It gives me the creeps."

Fliss went back to the kitchen.

"It's such a comfort to think that you are here, Ellen," she said, drawing on her gloves. "There's not a thing I can do to please her. She's so changed. All that she used to want was a movie and a bridge game. Now the only thing she wants is to talk over her symptoms with some old hag who recommends patent medicines and tells her not to let any one knife her. But it's rotten for you here, I suppose."

"It's only temporary. I told the doctor to send a nurse and I'd try to train her in—one of those practical nurses who can do housework and is sort of companionable. I have to get back to Mrs. Harrison, of course."

"Going back there? Why do you, Ellen? Please stick by us now."

"I will, as long as I can, but I promised Mrs. Harrison and she really couldn't get along without me."

"Let her get some one else."

"I promised her, Fliss. I'll fix your mother up, but I've got to go back to my own place."

Fliss stood up, passing her slim hands over her well-

tailored hips, lifting her hand bag delicately from the crowded table. Her face was perplexed.

"I'm no good at nursing, you know," she commented.

"No; but we must find some one who is just the right person."

"Do. And I'll come just as often as I possibly can."

"I would. She's your mother, Fliss."

Fliss frowned a little and went out into the sunlight. There her step quickened and her face grew gradually brighter. She seemed to be tossing the misery from her at every step.

She made some calls, told her hostesses a little plaintively about her worry for her mother, and after having exposed her trouble in several charming and handsome rooms, felt it vastly easier to bear. She succeeded in making it a little more remote, somehow putting it in a better setting.

By the time she reached home she could smile without effort, and even tell Matthew, whom she found dressing for dinner, that her mother would probably improve under Ellen's handling and consent to an operation.

"Good."

"If Ellen only stays. She wants to go back to Cecily."

"Wonderful what loyalty Cecily does inspire, isn't it?" said Matthew ruminatively.

"She probably pays Ellen well."

At Matthew's little laugh, which seemed so perfectly comprehending of all the jealousies in Fliss's mind, she flushed angrily. For a moment she seemed about to say something, but she did not. It was Matthew who spoke.

"Not worthy of you, Fliss."

"I know. It was stupid and jealous, but I get so tired of the eternal virtuousness of Cecily. Those with the servant mind may like it, but it bores me to death. She's so always right."

"She's always so right," corrected Matthew, teasingly.

"Have it your own way. I'd personally sooner be a cheerful sinner than such an unsmiling saint." She turned at the door. "And if you ask me I think poor Dick feels that way sometimes too."

CHAPTER XVII

THE cook could not get along with Jenny. Jenny gave notice and acted upon it promptly, deaf to remonstrance, because her young man was going to get her a place as waitress so she wouldn't "have to lower herself" doing housework. The laundress was ill with influenza and the substitute laundress did not wash the baby's clothes clean. That was why Mrs. Warner, coming into her daughter's house one morning in January, found Cecily herself in the laundry bending over a tub of diapers. Cecily was disheveled and a little defiant at her mother's protest.

"I don't see what else there is to do. If I can't get help, the children have to have clean clothes, don't they?"

Mrs. Warner, looking as incongruous in the laundry as a person possibly could, shook her head, simply implying that some things like washing diapers were quite impossible.

"You shouldn't do things like this. You ought to manage somehow."

"But how, mother?"

"Send the clothes over to my house. Get another laundress."

"There isn't one to be had for two days, and to send a bundle of clothes across the city is really too silly."

"Make your cook do them."

"And have her leave! No, that would be the last word. I'm through now. Wait until I hang these up and let's go upstairs."

"Let's—by all means."

Mrs. Warner led the way upstairs and gazed around the house. It was very orderly, but Cecily looked very tired.

"What does Dick say to all this?"

"Dick protests, but that doesn't solve the servant problem." There was a little edge in Cecily's tone. "Dick doesn't like domesticity anyhow if it interferes with his amusements."

"I wouldn't talk like that. It's not like you."

Cecily flushed. "Lots of things that didn't use to be like me are becoming normal. A little more Billingsgate in my manner is only natural after doing the washing, isn't it?"

Her mother did not smile. She looked worried.

"You are tired."

"Please don't say that, mother. Of course I'm tired. Why shouldn't I be tired? But it isn't lack of sleep or work that tires me as much as—other things."

"What things?" Mrs. Warner's questions came not curiously, but reluctantly as if she did not want confidences and was forcing herself to ask for them.

"People's point of view." By people she meant Dick, and Mrs. Warner knew it. She did not go on.

"Dear Cecily, I'm so sorry to overburden you with another worry just now, but some one else will tell you if I don't. You are bound to hear it about town in a day or so. And Leslie and I wanted to know what you thought about it before we decided finally what our attitude should be."

"What has happened?"

"I had a letter yesterday from Walter. It seems he is married."

"Walter—at college—married? But he's only twenty."

"Twenty-one to-morrow." Such sorrow in poor Mrs. Warner's voice as she reflected on that birthday.

"But are you sure? To whom?"

"To a girl he met in the town there. He wrote me simply that he was married and that he hoped we'd like Della. She is very pretty."

"But why marry her this way, mother? Why——" She stopped with a possible answer flashing through her own mind.

"He wrote your father, too. I didn't see that letter. Leslie said it was confidential, but he seemed to think Walter had done the only thing. He compromised the girl in some way. It seems they were out all night in an automobile—and there was talk." Neither woman spoke for a moment. Delicacy, fine distaste put an end to the conversation. Cecily's face grew harder than her mother's.

"Poor mother, poor mother."

"But I'm glad he married her, Cecily. It's not so bad for him as the other thing would have been. I couldn't have borne the other thing. I saw enough of that once. This shows at least that he has—conscience."

Cecily stood, meditating harshly on a probable Della.

"Where did he meet her?"

"At some dance in the town. She seems to be just an ordinary girl. And of course I don't know anything against her. We must think nothing. Probably she was only as foolish as many girls are nowadays. Your father thinks we must accept it and bring Walter and his wife home."

"Walter didn't say anything about this at Christmas time."

"No. I don't believe he contemplated anything of the sort then. It was sudden—as much so to him as to us, perhaps."

"Mother, you seem so excusing, so tolerant! Do we just have to accept a situation like this? Can the girl expect to be treated like the wife of your son? This girl who let herself be compromised."

Mrs. Warner gave again that queer impression of treating her trouble as if it had happened to some one else. In contrast to Cecily's protest she drew back a little.

"She is your brother's wife, Cecily."

"She has no right to such a title!"

"I was afraid you'd take it like this. You mustn't be so hard, Cecily. You must be tolerant."

"I'm tired of tolerance for laxity. I'm tired of moral laxity, of cheapness of ideals. Why should those of us who are decent do the work for the ones who aren't decent?"

"Work?"

"Work. Have the children and try to keep them clean and healthy and fine, while the women who won't have children, who won't work, won't do anything but play, get the real interest of every one?"

"They don't; they don't get the real respect of people. There may be a kind of attraction, but it's hardly skin-deep."

"You're wrong, mother. You're wrong. It's the so-called respect that's skin-deep. Men will tell you that the ideal woman is the good wife and mother, but you try being a good wife and mother and you're pretty soon a deadly bore; while the little half moral Dellas and Flisses are the women men give up things for and like to be with."

Mrs. Warner forced herself to a question. She did not answer Cecily's tirade, but struck at the root of it.

"Is anything seriously wrong between you and Dick?"

"No. Nothing seriously wrong, I suppose. I suppose

I wanted marriage to get deeper and better. It's getting thinner and almost tawdry. I wanted Dick to be content with it and me. And he's restless. He likes all this excitement and all these noisy people that I don't like. He doesn't want to stay home with me and the children."

"Surely he doesn't neglect you, dear."

"Ah, it's not so tangible. It's simply that I don't satisfy."

"Cecily, darling, aren't you imagining all this?"

"I thought so, mother. Then I didn't think so, but I tried to think so. Then I knew that I wasn't. You see, mother, I'm growing up. I'm trying to live by the ideals I was taught were the ones to live by, but I can't find any one else living by them. At first I thought Dick thought as I did—wanted to live as I do. He doesn't. Secretly he thinks I'm stupid."

Her mother tried to laugh reassuringly. "That's so foolish. You know better than that, Cecily. I can't see that you've any real grievance. You're going through a hard period now. But the babies will grow older and all this——"

"Suppose I have more babies."

Mrs. Warner hesitated. "Are you quite strong enough now, I wonder?"

"Oh," cried Cecily, "you are evading me, too. Are there no rights and wrongs? Why was I brought up to believe in right and wrong? Is everything compromise? Babies, marriage, Dellas?"

Fine lines stood out in Mrs. Warner's face. "I never had your fundamental courage or strength," she said, "but there was a time when I did believe in very black wrong and very white right. That was when I married your father. He was a brilliant man and I loved him, not as I love your dear stepfather, but differently. I don't let myself remember that first part of my love. I

can't, even yet. But your father was a poor husband; he was a poor father; he was not honest with me; he was not even faithful. When I found that out—he told me—I said that I would not let it kill me, but it nearly did. The first had seemed so beautiful that to find it was not even real——” Her voice dragged, weighted even now with the horrible discovery. Cecily, her eyes half closed in imagining the pain, listened. “Since then I have believed that most things are compromise. All the happiness in my life, the real happiness, has come through compromise. All the pain through the lack of it. You have so much more than I had with your father. Dick is good. I know he loves you. I know he is faithful to you.”

“Oh, yes, mother—faithful,” Cecily shuddered at the words, “of course. I didn't mean——”

“My husband wasn't,” said Mrs. Warner simply, and went on: “You have much to learn about men and much tolerance to acquire.”

But the softening in Cecily was lost at that word.

“Don't you see that I think all this trouble comes because we are so tolerant? Tolerant of ideals! Why should I be tolerant of Walter's wife? Of Fliss?”

“Why do you bring in Florence Allenby?”

“Because she typifies all the things I'm struggling against. She seems to invade this whole house with her ideas. I suppose she's no worse than lots of others, but she's the specific example. Dick admires her.”

“Likes her, you mean.”

“Well——”

“Men are bound to like her. She's the kind of woman that satisfies a need of men, for flattery, for play.”

“She's fun,” said Cecily, bitterly.

Her mother agreed.

“And because she's fun and because Della is fun, Mat-

thew is tied to her for the rest of his life and poor Walter at twenty-one is tied to his Della."

"But Matthew and Walter are happy."

"They shouldn't be happy like that! It's unworthy!"

Mrs. Warner stood up. "We've talked a lot and I'm not convincing you. Perhaps I won't ever convince you that I'm right. You're strong, Cecily. You don't know yet how strong. But when you were a little thing I could see the will in you, underneath the dreaming and the softness. I think now that your father's laxities have turned in you to rigors. Just now you're tired and upset by your problems and your household and inclined to group all your troubles into a very destructive point of view. You mustn't. Walter is married. Gerald writes that he thinks it is all right. He likes Della, too. His father and I want to bring Walter home and to make the most of the situation. If Della is possible material to form into the sort of woman we would like to see Walter have for a wife, it is our privilege to do it. Your example will be necessary and helpful. You're young, and you're a happy, married woman."

She smiled at Cecily and Cecily smiled back through a mist of tears.

"Please help me with Della by being tolerant of her. Think what it will mean to Walter to have his mistake, if it is a mistake, turned to good account—to have us receive his wife instead of being hard on her."

"You're so fine and wise and beautiful," sighed Cecily. "I am foolish; haunted by chimeras. But I feel so glad, mother, to have said it all."

"It isn't ended in the saying. But it has helped us both to have talked a little. Shall we go to see the babies before I go?"

They were themselves again—the beautiful, passive woman and the lovely, eager girl, hiding again their depths

and the disturbances in them. Mrs. Warner smoothed over the surface as well as the depths. She sent her housemaid to stay with the children and insisted that Cecily and Dick come to her house for dinner, where the case of Walter and Della was discussed and so much the best made of it that the tragic part was fairly smothered in hopes.

Three weeks later, after a wedding trip financed by his father, Walter brought Della home. The family in Carrington were thoroughly adjusted to the blow by that time and a few newspaper notices and careful statements of Mrs. Warner and Cecily had made it clear to their friends and acquaintances that Walter was not to return as a prodigal, but to a very genuine welcome. Yet at the first glance at Della, Cecily felt her heart sink.

It would have been so much easier if Della had been flagrantly impossible, if she had been chewing gum or wearing lace veils and jockey perfume, but showing a diffidence and teachability that they could work with. Cecily had seen so many Dellas, she thought as she looked at her. Della was small and pretty and stylish. Stylish without imagination, wearing the "latest" in everything; a kind of fashion book model with fashion book curves and a manner that was reminiscent of the stories in the fashion books. She came into the Warners' big drawing-room behind Walter, a kind of pertness and determination to demonstrate that she was as "good as anybody else" most apparent in her greetings. Mrs. Warner's kindness and Cecily's welcome excited no gratitude. She was going to deal with Walter's family without making any concessions. Walter's slight evident excitement and sensitiveness, his response to what his people were offering him were lost on her. She giggled a little and talked about how cold it had been in the sleeper and

how she guessed everybody on the train knew they were "newly-weds" and how funny it was getting used to another name. There was a trace of petulance in her manner towards Walter, too.

"I told him he just better hurry with his suit-case, that I wasn't going to pack it for him—break him in wrong," she said.

Cecily, the memory of her own wedding trip coming back to her, with its wonder of service, felt herself helpless.

"We've got to find a place to live now, I suppose," was Della's next comment.

"But there's no hurry surely. We want you to stay with us for a while until we get acquainted," said Mrs. Warner.

"That's nice of you, but we'll want a place of our own as soon as we can find one and Walter goes to work. I suppose you people didn't like his leaving college."

"A college degree is sometimes valuable," said Mr. Warner, rather grimly.

"Well, I don't know. I wonder sometimes what good it does them. I've always lived in a college town, you know, and been used to college men; been used to lots of fun, haven't I, Walter? Well, as I was saying, I don't know that finishing your course gets you any place especially. Sometimes those who don't, get ahead the fastest."

They all refrained from comment. Walter had grown a little flushed.

"Can I take Della upstairs? She's tired, I know, mother."

"Isn't he bossy?" from Della.

"Yes, dear, take her up to your own room. It's ready for you."

A little-boy, lonesome look came into Walter's face for

a moment. Then he turned to Della and took her out of the room. Mrs. Warner looked at her husband and then at Cecily.

"Did you say I was to be a model for her?" asked Cecily, with her new grimness. "For her? Why, the girl scorns me."

"She's certainly going to make Walter stand around," said Mr. Warner, with a feeble attempt at jocularity. Then, at the sight of the tears in his wife's eyes he was beside her in an instant. "She's not so bad," he declared. "Lots of energy and nerve in that small person."

Lots of energy and lots of nerve there were. In the succeeding weeks they all found out how much. Della, twirling on her finger the platinum and diamond symbol that she was a Warner, knew how to have a good time and how to get what she wanted. She was fond of Walter in her under-bred little way. Though she scolded at him, she was always willing to have him exhibit his affection in public, and in automobiles and theatres would curl into his arms in a way that was unceasingly embarrassing to the people with her.

Cecily, who had planned on winning her confidence, soon found that confidence a thing to dread. Della's easy, careless tongue ran away with itself on most occasions. She wanted to tell Cecily intimate things that Cecily could not bring herself to listen to. And when Cecily, trying to impart an ideal or a vision, half opened her mind to Della, she found her visions ignored or criticized.

"Cute kids, aren't they?" commented Della. "But whatever do you do with so many? It's wonderful how you've kept your figure, though."

That ended that lesson.

Dick was amused. He laughed above Cecily's constant dismay.

"It's a damned shame Walter married that chicken.

But then, if he's satisfied! Did you see her try to vamp me?" And he was off in a gale of chuckles.

Gradually, after a few weeks, they stopped trying to do things with Della. She had her little apartment with its expensive furnishings paid for by Mr. Warner and she and Walter kept an unceasing succession of exploiting maids and dined out at public places at least half the time. Cecily simply made the best of her. She was unceasingly busy at home. Ellen's vacation had lengthened. She had written most contritely that she could not come back at once. "As soon as I can, but my cousin won't have a nurse. We are trying to find one that will do her."

Cecily made determined efforts not to let her household weigh on her. She told herself again and again that there must be ways to manage. She interviewed nurses and cooks, bribed employment agencies, but even with all her effort her mind could never escape from her house and her babies. The little grudge against Dick that he could escape, that he could want, as he so often did want, gayety and people, wore deeper in her.

CHAPTER XVIII

DICK HARRISON was R. G. Harrison in the Second National Bank Building. R. G. Harrison was increasingly important. He had started at twenty-five, looking after his dead father's interests and fortune. At thirty-six he had taken his place among the young business men of the city who had made good and could contribute not only money, but also brains to the public benefit. He had been involved in various enterprises, all of them successful, but more and more he had withdrawn and concentrated lately on the mines in which Matthew Allenby and his company were interested. Dick and Matthew were constantly increasing their holdings, playing it together. Dick was director of the bank housed in the building where he had his office, and director of half a dozen companies; but his main interest was in the Lebanon Range mines.

If Cecily felt that Dick only half knew the difficulties she had in her house, it did not occur to Dick to counter that she knew little of the press of things that weighed on him through his business day—interests, worries, decisions, definite things. Little wonder that the intangible "something" which troubled Cecily could not impress him as serious. Serious things were the next tax on the mines, the threatened difficulties with labor agitators, the money tightness in the country. The business of the world, the business that kept food in people's mouths, provided homes and motors and jewels and luxuries—that was real. He was becoming a little prone to dismiss

Cecily's tendencies to be easily "hurt," to object to his desire for amusement of one kind and another, on the general premise that "women are queer."

So he said to Matthew as they sat in his office one day after disposing of a host of details.

"Women are queer."

"Original, aren't you?"

"Well, I'm just beginning to find out that it's true."

"That remark," commented Matthew, "always seemed to me not to be far from the vaudeville stuff about women—husband and wife fight stuff. It's cheap cant. Women queer! Every one's queer!"

"So, why pick on women, eh?"

"Exactly."

"Well, I'll tell you why. With a man you know where you are. You size him up and you know how to deal with him. With women you can size up again and again; you think you've got it and then you find that just the thing you've done to please them is the thing that doesn't please them."

"More and more like George Cohan. Why have you such a sudden discouraged interest in women, Dick?"

"I haven't an interest in women. I was just thinking that I'd like to know how to make things a bit easier for Cecily."

He sounded quite serious and anxious for confidence. Matthew dropped his air of banter and stood at the window staring down over the miles of commercial roofs below him. It was immensely difficult for them both to go on and yet they both wanted to. Matthew began at the beginning.

"Are things hard for Cecily?"

Dick looked at him squarely. "I rather thought you guessed she was a bit blue when you took her away from the dance that night during Christmas week."

"I thought she was tired out, if that's what you're driving at. I should think you'd expect that. A woman who has three children——"

"For God's sake, don't begin that. I can't have them myself, can I? And it isn't just babies and servants."

"No, but you have to understand that the strain——"

"I know all about that. I haven't had it off my mind for three years. I am trying to get it off Cecily's mind. That's the reason I think she ought to get about a bit—judging from the way I feel myself."

"That's it, Dick."

"What's it?"

"Judging from the way you feel yourself, you think Cecily ought to want the things you want. Instead, she wants something else."

"I wish I knew what it was. I'd do anything on God's earth if I could find out what it is."

"She wants what you can't give her, I think."

A glimmer of proprietary jealousy came into Dick's eyes. "How in hell do you know so much about it?"

"Now, look here, Dick; you began this conversation, you know——"

"I know I did. And I want to go on with it. What is it Cecily wants that she hasn't got and that I can't give her?"

Matthew looked a little nonplussed and embarrassed.

"This is a fool of a conversation."

"But I want to know."

"Well, I should say that Cecily wants love."

"What!" cried Dick, getting up. "Who?"

"Oh, as far as that goes, you; unfortunately, you alone."

"And you have the damned nerve to say I can't give her that."

Matthew seemed imperturbable. "Not her kind."

"Maybe you think that you could."

"Don't be so primitive, Dick. I don't think any such rotten thing. If you will chain your spirited desires to do murder for a moment I'll finish what I was about to say—what you urged me to say after having dragged me into this conversation. I think that Cecily is so attuned to delicacy and to fine things—so in love with her love of you—that any suggestion of coarseness or let down, any slight deterioration of quality in feeling, any fear that you are becoming cheapened by the wrong kind of people or the wrong kind of amusement (and most of the amusement she sees is tawdry in her eyes), hurts her—more than hurts her."

"It's very highbrow," said Dick, "but I suppose you mean she wants a perpetual honeymoon."

Matthew threw up his hands. "There you go—vaudeville stuff again."

Dick flushed angrily. "Well, I'll be damned if I think you've said one definite tangible thing—one thing a man can tie to."

"I didn't mean to. Cecily's troubles are quite mental—quite intangible—partly the result of an education which is totally out of accord with the times. It leaves women too sensitive for these days. Fliss's High School was better for her."

"So you think I can't appreciate my wife."

"There are precious few people who can appreciate Cecily."

"And what do you advise me to do about it?"

"Why, I don't know that there's much to be done. You might try to please her in little things; give up the things that seem silly to her—dancing with a lot of silly idiots——"

Dick let his fists drop on his desk with a kind of angry decision.

"That's what it gets down to, after all, isn't it? Because Cecily doesn't care for a certain kind of thing I am to give it up absolutely; without any assurance that I'll get anywhere if I do. And what happens to me? You say I can't play up to Cecily anyway. Am I to sit at home and twirl my thumbs and be sighed over?"

"You're becoming absurd."

"I'm not absurd. I'm working hard. You know I'm working hard and I've got to have a little fun. I'm going to be old in five years. I've only a few years of even the end of youth left. Isn't the absurd thing that Cecily and I can't enjoy things together? But I catch myself wondering all the time if she isn't disapproving, if she doesn't think I'm coarse. I get so tired of playing up to her instead of being easy and natural."

"And the coarse streak in you aches for a bit of ribaldry."

Dick smiled sheepishly. "Perhaps."

The twilight had fallen now. Matthew, pacing by the window again, looked down on the streets, dark and soft through a sudden fall of snow. He turned and laid his hand on Dick's shoulder.

"Well, anyway, life's a queer mess," he said.

Dick looked at him curiously, somewhat abashed at this personal, tangled conversation.

"We're a pair of nuts," he said, "and I'll be late to dinner, and there's a new cook."

They took their hats.

"They're still talking of you for the Senate, Matthew."

"It's rot. I've never had a political office outside of Carrington."

"Lots of people like that idea, and of course the reason the old birds who've been in at the game have their eye on you is because you've got a strangle hold on so many

votes. You're a greater hero around here than Pershing since all that draft board and home guard stuff."

"Heavy military service, that was."

"Heavy military acquaintance. General acquaintance and a clean name. They'll get you yet."

"We'll see," answered Matthew. "Maybe some day I would like to have an inside glimpse of Washington, but not for a while yet, even if I could get in, which is very unlikely. About that man Martin at the Everett mine——"

They clamped their thoughts to that man Martin with some relief. In Matthew's car, as they slid and skidded along through the streets, "It seems such rot—this fuss about moods—when there are people around here by the thousands with actual troubles, hunger, cold and sickness." That was Dick. It expressed his feeling for reality.

"Some people live by moods—by the spirit," answered Matthew.

Matthew went home. Fliss was dining out and had expressly excluded him from the party, characterizing it as a "bunch that would bore you to death. Eat at the club and I'll let the maids go out. Come and pick me up if you like. I'll say you're working." So Matthew went through the silent house, so perfectly in order, so dimly lit, up to the third floor. In his own rooms a sense of ease and security seemed to envelop him. He lit the small fire that was always laid in readiness for him and settled himself before it comfortably with his pipe. He had forgotten or refused to consider dinner. The room became very quiet, the crackle of the fire only bringing out the stillness and mystery of thought.

He had been there a couple of hours when there was a knock on the door, and before he could rise to open it, his wife pushed it open and stood on the threshold, her

golden evening cloak wrapped around her, a few snow-flakes clinging to her uncovered hair.

"Where did you drop from? I was going to come for you later."

"I left after dinner, and, finding you were home, I took liberties with your solitude. Can I sit down in the holy place?"

Her gayety did not ring true. Matthew pushed a chair up to the fire and she sat down in it. Matthew watched her, sparkling even in the firelight.

"Such a fool bunch," sighed Fliss.

"Not yearning for intellectual heights are you, Fliss?" asked her husband lightly.

She flushed a little and moved back out of the ring of firelight. "It would be absurd, wouldn't it?"

"Your going in for the intellectual heights? I wouldn't say absurd, but a bit out of your line, perhaps."

"Out of my line."

"Feeling a little down?"

"Bored."

"We'll have to get up some excitement," said Matthew kindly.

She winced. "Don't treat me as if I were a three-year-old."

"I couldn't. I treat you as if you were what you are—a charming woman."

"You think I'm an awful fool, don't you?"

He went over to her and leaned over the back of her chair, pushing her hair back from her forehead. "Pretty Fliss!"

She jumped up, away from his touch. "That's it! That's all of it. Pretty Fliss! I might be a puppy; I might be an idiot."

Matthew waited for her to go on, and after a minute she did.

"I get so tired of—of being a jazzier—of having you think I'm just a jazzier. I think a lot of things, truly I do, Matthew," she added, naïvely.

"Of course you do."

"Don't say it like that—soothingly. Say it as if you meant it."

"Of course you do," said Matthew in heavy, mock seriousness.

She made a futile little gesture and turned away, wrapping her cloak around her desolately.

"I'd better go."

"No; stay, and talk to me."

"Amuse you?"

"Amuse me."

"I don't want to amuse you." She was very pathetic now. "I want to do other things for you, with you. Couldn't I stimulate you, maybe?"

He laughed. "You do, angel; you do, immensely."

Then all in a minute she lost control. The primitive instincts in her, so untrained by social or intellectual discipline, so thinly overlaid with "manners," came through. She was by his side, sobbing, her arms thrown around him like a child's.

"I want you to love me, to respect me, admire me—like—like you do Cecily!"

Matthew's face grew really stern. He held her, but without a touch of emotion. Then, when her anger seemed to have spent itself, he drew her to the big chair, down on his knees, patting her hand. After a little she looked up at him as if she sought for a trace of the thing she wanted. His glance met hers gravely.

"When we agreed to be married, do you remember what we talked about and decided? Haven't I given you everything I promised?"

"Everything."

That softened him. "And you've given me more than I ever hoped for—youth and happiness and comfort and the sight of you. Aren't we happy enough, Fliss, without mixing ourselves up in a hunt after emotions that probably can't naturally develop in us?"

"Can't they—can't I be more; couldn't I learn?"

He put his hand over her mouth. "Don't spoil your own quality, Fliss. And remember that I'm getting older and the capacity for certain kinds of emotion is passing me by."

"But you feel it for Cecily."

He set her on her feet like a naughty child and stood facing her. "Fliss, there is nothing in any feeling which I may or may not have for Cecily which concerns you remotely."

She had probed too deep with her awkward weapons. At the rebuff she stood looking at him wide-eyed, hurt, pathetic.

"I've broken our bargain, haven't I?" she said at length, stumblingly.

"It doesn't matter. We'll just forget all this. You've made me so happy in so many ways, Fliss. A home and you——"

"But I can't reach down in you; I never get down."

"It's all right, Fliss dear. You get down far enough. Don't let's wreck things by asking too much of the fates."

She played her last card. "If, perhaps we had a baby?"

He smiled at her with great tenderness.

"I'd love to have a baby, Fliss dear, but you mustn't give up or try to give up everything for me."

She must have seen, as she looked, that no sentimentality would ever break him down, ever penetrate those depths which she had come to revere and to covet so much.

"Let's go downstairs now, and you can get me some supper, if there's anything in the house," he suggested, trying to get back to solid ground again. She shook her head.

"Let me go alone for a little while. Come down later."

She went downstairs, through the beautiful rooms which she had planned so carefully and which meant so much to her, her head hanging a little as if she had been a rebuffed child. The front door was open, blown open by a gust of wind after her careless closing. Moved by some impulse, she went out on the veranda. The street was quiet. It was a street of affluence, the entrance and door lights on the houses glowing softly, the red lights of motors quietly signaling through the snow. Wealth, luxury, comfort. Perhaps Fliss knew dimly that her only step towards acquiring the strength which might win Matthew's complete respect was to go away from him now, now that their bargain was broken and she loved him as he did not love her. She might go away.

Glancing up and down the street, she shuddered a little. Then went in, and closing the door, carefully this time, proceeded to the kitchen and set about finding the most delicious possible supper for Matthew.

CHAPTER XIX

THERE were many times when Cecily felt the absurdity of allowing her life to be affected by her domestic machinery and the servants who operated it. It wasn't, she felt, dignified. She somehow could not find a place in her philosophy of marriage for the cooks, the housemaids and the nurses. They had to be if she wanted to escape the physical work in a house spacious enough for her needs, but to have to regulate her life by them bothered her. The cheap comedy of the whole servant problem affronted her and to have to play a rôle in it herself was increasingly irritating. Her mother helped her as much as she could by sending her servants, but the presence of three babies was anathema to most of them and they would stay a little while and drift off to a place with "two in the family and the highest wages." And now her mother had gone to California to avoid the wintry spring of Carrington. Della and Walter were keeping that house open, and coöperation was not in Della's line. It did not occur to her to help Cecily out by lending her servants, as Mrs. Warner had sometimes done. Cecily paid high wages, higher and higher, utterly disproportionate to the service she was getting, but money of course inspired no loyalty. There were quarrels in the kitchen between the maids—unpleasant hiatuses when Cecily washed her own Wedgwood china and beautiful hand-made silver dishes. It was all very absurd, but there it was; because there was an actual undersupply of servants in Carrington and because so many women wanted

servants and were unable or unwilling to get their own meals and make their own beds at any price, there was a situation which actually affected many a woman's health and had its influence on married happiness and undoubtedly on the birth rate. What began as a joke had been treated as a joke too long, long after it had become a really sinister influence.

With Ellen in her house it was unnecessary to count and to watch; unnecessary to fear that the children's food might be insufficiently or badly cooked if she were out. Ellen liked to work, had a conscience about her work and a respect for it that was unusual, and she managed the other servants. Just as Cecily felt pride in her home and her children—felt instinctively that, even if domesticity were out of fashion, it was not rightly or permanently so—so Ellen felt her own pride in oiling the machinery of Cecily's house. They liked each other and understood each other. And as Ellen watched the development of the children, saw Dorothea take her first steps and graduate from cream of wheat to scraped beef, helped little Leslie through the same formula of growth and watched and aided Cecily through their illnesses—a real friendship, more fundamental than many a one between so-called social equals, grew between the two women.

It was the day after Dick had talked to Matthew with such unusual revelation. Cecily's latest cook had proved herself in two days both insolent and incompetent and, hunting up the forwarding address for Ellen's letters, Cecily decided to go to Ellen herself and see if in conversation they could not find a way to take care of the unwieldy relative and let Ellen come back to her. It struck her as she entered the apartment house that she had been here before and yet the cracked, painted walls of the hall were not familiar. She stood before the row of black tin mail boxes looking for Ellen's name and saw

it at last written in lead pencil on a printed card stuck crookedly in the name place. Ellen Forrest—and the card, Mr. Wm. H. Horton.

Cecily pondered the familiarity of the name for a minute before its connection flashed upon her. Then she remembered. She had brought Fliss to the door of this apartment house several times; this was where Fliss lived before she had married. She hesitated, then rang the bell, and mounted the stairs to the third floor. A voice called to her to come in, a high-pitched, quite unpleasant voice and, entering, she saw a woman lying on a leather sofa pushed up to a small library table. She recognized her in spite of the disorderly hair and red bathrobe. It was Fliss's mother. She had met her two or three times at Fliss's own house.

Mrs. Horton knew her also. She was a little embarrassed, but not excessively so, being very simple in her ways in spite of Fliss.

"It's Mrs. Harrison, isn't it? Well, won't you sit down? I'm real embarrassed to have you find me looking so, but I'm not able to get about much any more, you know."

"I didn't know you were ill, Mrs. Horton? Isn't it a shame? Is it anything serious?"

Mrs. Horton winced, although at the same time a glad consciousness of the new visitor, to whom she could expound her ills, showed in her face.

"I don't know. You know how doctors are. They say I've got a growth. Now they want to operate on me, but I'm afraid of that and I don't doubt but that it's all foolishness. I'm trying a new cure now—perhaps you've read about it——" She droned on in the unceasing manner of the patent medicine addict. Cecily listened. She had not yet had a chance to explain her visit, and she was full of crowding thoughts. So this was where Fliss had

lived. No wonder it had been an escape to marry Matthew. This mother—but the poor woman was very ill. There were terrible pain ravages on her face. Hadn't Ellen said cancer? But where was Ellen? And was it possible that Fliss had bribed her to get her there? Or was there really a relationship?

Just at that moment Ellen came in. She looked astonished, but, like Mrs. Horton, was too simple to be much disturbed.

"Why, Mrs. Harrison!"

Cecily shook hands with her. "I didn't know that Mrs. Horton was your cousin, Ellen."

"No; I guess I didn't happen to mention it," said Ellen.

Not a word of Fliss. There was no need.

"I do hope you haven't come to try to get Ellen back," said Mrs. Horton. "I don't see how I could get along at all without her."

"We all need Ellen," Cecily answered.

"Well, of course, being a relative and all, I'd sooner have her with me than a nurse. Those trained nurses are awful high and mighty. And of course Ellen don't really need to work out at all now. Now that Fliss is married, I tell her she could always have Fliss's room."

"You must miss your daughter."

"Well, Fliss always was a great one to go. I don't know as I saw much more of her than I do now, when she was living at home. Of course she don't have much time to come here with her social doings and all."

They talked for a few minutes and then Ellen took things into her own hands.

"I've got to go to the market now," she said, "if I'm to get anything fresh for dinner. I'll walk down with you, Mrs. Harrison."

Cecily rose in spite of Mrs. Horton's protest.

"I know you'll beg Ellen away from me. I don't want to be mean about it, but being as I'm her own cousin, it seems as if I couldn't get along. If I could get my friend Mrs. Ellis, who's a widow, I might."

"Now don't you fret, Carrie, and get your fever up. No one's going to leave you. There's just a few things that Mrs. Harrison and me would like to discuss private."

She wore her neat blue suit and as they came out of the apartment house together no trace of servility or embarrassment clung to Ellen.

"You see," she said, "with Mrs. Allenby—Fliss—being at your house so much and all, I thought it was just as well not to tell you we was related. I asked her not to mention it, too."

"So foolish. I wish she had insisted. But you aren't the least bit like one another. I never would have guessed."

"No; there's no noticeable resemblance. How's little Leslie, and Dorothea, and the baby?"

"They miss you and they don't get along as fast as they should with so many strange people taking care of them. Can't you come back, Ellen? I'd like you to come back as housekeeper—take general charge. Couldn't you do that?"

"You mustn't think I was the least bit dissatisfied, Mrs. Harrison. I liked working for you. It was true every word I said. You see Mrs. Horton don't want a nurse. She's terrible fussy just now."

"Is she very ill?"

"She's going to die, I'm afraid. It's going awfully fast. We've been sort of letting up on the operation question because the doctors don't hold out much hope for her anyhow. Of course she don't know how bad she is."

"Does her daughter know?"

"Yes, Fliss knows."

"Poor thing."

"I would like to come back to you, Mrs. Harrison. I've been thinking that if that Mrs. Ellis comes I could. I'd really have to, since they haven't room for more than one of us. And this Mrs. Ellis is closer to Carrie than I am myself; she knew her when she was a bride. I tell you what I'll do. I'll find out and let you know on Sunday. Is that all right with you?"

"Yes, indeed. I don't want you to leave your poor cousin, but if this other friend of hers is coming and you aren't really needed——"

"I know. We'll try to do the best by all," answered Ellen, following the line of thought of John Stuart Mill instinctively.

They shook hands gravely. Cecily went away with a sense of outrage and justification. So that was Fliss!

There was a small dinner at the Garden House Club, for Mrs. Walter Warner, the next week. Della was taking rather well on the whole. Mrs. Longstreet, who liked to "bring out" young people, was the hostess. The Walter Warners, the Richard Harrisons, the Matthew Allenbys, the Frederick Craigs, Madeline Ensign and her husband, Gordon Ames, the boy who had so vainly pursued Fliss and who, with college back of him and a start in his profession, was no longer a boy but a much sought after man, Helen Jefferson, because every one hoped that Gordon would marry her, and a half-dozen other couples—all young, all extremely well acquainted with each other. Della was quite at her best. With nothing to do except be nominal mistress of her mother-in-law's home and plenty of service at her disposal, Della was keeping in excellent form. It was easy to see to-night why Walter had fallen so very much in love with her. Her

pale yellow hair was like a mist around her head and the green of her gown was either a stroke of luck or a stroke of genius, thought Cecily. She looked curiously at Fliss in the light of the revelations of her call on her mother the day before. Fliss evidently did not know about that yet or if she did she made no reference. She greeted Cecily casually and turned back to the glass.

"Just below your cheek-bones, my dear. Most people put it on too high up. It gives much more the look of youth, not that you need that, but you know."

Della experimented. Cecily looked over their heads at her own hair, combed heavily back in dark waves, at her own cheeks faintly pink with cold. She had it in mind to disdain rouge, but Fliss's professionalism was tantalizing. She opened her little gold case and gave her cheeks a touch of red below the cheek bone.

"You don't need it, Cecily. You're better without," said Fliss, observing.

"Cecily's always better looking than anybody else," contributed Madeline. "You really are, Cecily."

Della gave Cecily a critical glance. "It's much easier for a brunette," she sighed.

That brought her the anticipated compliments from the rest. Cecily did not join them. She was watching Fliss and Della, suddenly mindful that it had not been so long ago when Fliss was more or less outside of all this easy fun. She looked back over the obvious steps of the progress Fliss had made. Funny! And that queer-looking woman in the soiled kimono dying of cancer; and out there Matthew waiting for his wife to take her to their hostess, to pay her honor. She wasn't worth it. Walter waiting for his wife, for the girl who had pulled him out of college into marriage, who had probably tricked him, who had no respect for marriage. She wasn't worth it, either! Worth what? She caught her

mind back and began to talk to Madeline as they strolled out into the little reception room to meet their husbands.

At dinner she sat between Freddy Craig and Howard Ensign—rather on the dull side of the table. Fliss above and across from her had Dick and Gordon Ames, and Della on the right of her host was dividing her attentions between him and Matthew. Cecily talked at random, intermittent, necessary conversation, her mind and eyes straying to the brightness of Fliss. She seemed so eager and Dick seemed so pleased by her eagerness and so alert. She couldn't make it out. No right—no wrong. Why can't I be like the rest of them, she thought, immediately conscious that to be like the rest of them was just what she did not want.

Fliss was telling Dick something *sotto voce*. He listened closely and then broke into irrepressible laughter. Fliss looked at him provocatively and his eyes were slanting down at her in that amused, liking way.

Howard Ensign was following Cecily's eyes.

"Isn't Mrs. Allenby a lot of fun?" he asked.

"Oh, yes," answered Cecily, mechanically, "lots of fun."

"She gives everybody such a good time."

Fun. That was it. Fun, that god whom they all worshiped. Like a heathen god, like a great bright image, casting great shadows. Queer thought. She sat in the shadow while they worshiped the brightness. An impulse came to Cecily to call to Fliss to stop. She was pinning a flower in Dick's buttonhole. It was a wager or a joke. Everybody was laughing. She had no right to touch Dick like that. Dick didn't care. Dick had no pride, no self-respect, no respect for love,—or he wouldn't let her touch him like that. She was caressing him.

Fliss caught her glance. "Mustn't, Dick," she said,

laughingly. "Your wife's looking at me. She has her till-death-do-us-part look on."

Her voice carried and they turned to look at Cecily—all the people at the end of the table—merrily, jocularly. Cecily tried to smile, tortured by the glances that seemed to be penetrating her thoughts. Dick looked a little annoyed.

"Don't be worried, Cecily." Fliss wouldn't leave her alone.

"I wasn't worried." Now they were laughing. That wasn't what she should have said. She should have been light, gay, debonair, flippant. Why? Because that was what they expected.

Like a match to a gathered pile of brush were the comments to Cecily's resentment. She was suddenly angry as she had never been angry before in her life—cruelly angry. She wanted to hurt them all—Fliss, Della most. But her opportunity did not come till later.

Howard found her better company. She talked to him now, seeming to insist on talking. He told her about how he thought game should be cooked, about the new club rules for membership, about the things he was interested in. She answered him, played up to him, her mind alert, her eyes casually now on that other end of the table.

"We'll get up a party and go," she heard Dick say. They were drinking coffee. Fliss was devoting herself more to Gordon. There was a smoldering look in Gordon's eyes that Cecily read and that it shamed her to read. He looked as if the presence of people, of Matthew himself, hardly interested him. He wanted to slip his arm down close around her, bend his head lower. Dick was competing for her favor, actually competing.

"We'll get up a party," he repeated. "There's a tiled

floor and the funniest nigger band you ever heard. You'll love it, Fliss."

"All right," said Fliss. "Will you come along, Cecily?"

That was to demonstrate her power, thought Cecily. Fliss was asking her to a party with her own husband.

"If I can," she answered coldly. "If I get a cook and can manage to get out."

A little smile of pitying superiority to one so tied down by domestic affairs showed on Fliss's face.

"Miserable luck, Cecily." Then to Dick, "Do you starve without a cook, poor Dick?"

Like a flash Cecily struck back. Cool and icy and penetrating her voice carried down the table length.

"I think I'll have my old cook back shortly. She is nursing your mother now, you know, Fliss." And to her neighbor quite clearly, "She had to go to Mrs. Horton, of course, because she is her cousin."

There was the faintest little smile, the smallest hush. Mrs. Longstreet's eyebrows went up and then down,—her only signal of lack of equilibrium. Then she rose and the company followed. Only in that instant Cecily had seen Dick's angry glance and the cruel flush that had risen on the face of Fliss. It delighted her to see that the blow had gone home. Then an acute sense of degradation swallowed up her delight.

Dick did not claim her for the first dance. It was Fliss he danced with. When he did come to his wife, he looked at her with his eyes still angry. "Dance this, Cecily?"

"Where did you learn that raw stuff?" he asked after they had been around the floor silently.

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. That was a pretty raw attack on Fliss."

"Attack?"

"Attack was what I said."

"You mean when I mentioned to Fliss that her cousin couldn't come to cook. I hadn't told you, had I, that Ellen was a cousin of the Hortons'."

"I can't see that it is of much consequence whether she is or not, but you knew how a lot of those people at dinner would make capital of it. It was a deliberate attempt to hurt her. I can't see why you should do such a thing."

"You ought to know why," said Cecily. "You ought to know why. Because that woman is dangerous. Because she's unworthy. She was flirting with you and with Gordon Ames—she was acting like a bad woman—leaning on you."

"Don't be so cheaply jealous."

"I'm going home," declared Cecily. "I won't stay here in this place."

"Very well. You've ruined a delightful party anyhow. Will you say good-night?"

He did not speak to her on the way home, unlocked the door for her and then when she was in the little vestibule said coolly, "I'm going to the club for a couple of hours. Good-night, Cecily."

The door closed and Cecily went upstairs, her throat choking her. Anger, resentment, but most of all the terrible agony of thought that they had quarreled again and that Dick could not see what she saw nor feel what she felt! Softly she stole through the nurseries so that the children might not be awakened. The sight of them gave her no joy to-night. Only deeper pain and deeper sense of failure! Yet it was some comfort to touch the baby hand lying on Dorothea's little coverlet, so warm, so confiding even in her sleep. She thought as she stood there of the people who say that they could absorb themselves in their children. Surely even children did not fill

up all the spaces in life; not for her anyway could they suffice.

At first she thought Dick would be gone only an hour. She undressed slowly, planning what she would say to him. It became clearer to her that she had been shabby and unworthy. She would tell Dick she was sorry, make it up somehow. The hour passed. She crept into bed and waited. But he did not come. One o'clock—half past one; Cecily got up, tormented by the waiting and all the possibilities it suggested. Where *was* Dick? Wasn't he coming back at all? Was it possible that he had left the city? Had there been an accident?

The children slept on. The house was terribly still. She tried to read, tried to think, wrote a note to Dick and placed it on his bureau, only to go in and destroy it after another half hour's waiting. She thought she would go mad with anxiety. She determined to be quite indifferent. She would not care if he did not. Again she slipped into her bed and this time fell asleep.

When she awoke it was daylight and the telephone was ringing in the distance. She heard the maid answer, heard Dick take the call on his extension. He was home then. He must have come in after half past two. The murmur of his voice was indistinct. She lay there feeling as if she had been beaten; physically tired from the strain of the night before. The children were being dressed in the nursery. She wondered what the inefficient woman in the kitchen was doing, but the routine did not stir her to action as it usually did.

She heard Dick still telephoning. A sick feeling at the thought of meeting him came over her. Would he come in or would he appear at breakfast,—cold, condemning, unjust?

He came in. She braced herself a little, but there was no need. He came swiftly over to her and stood looking

down at her, his face troubled, pale. She had not guessed that he would feel like that.

"Cecily, I've got to tell you something dreadful. Are you going to be game—brave, darling?"

He was in love with Fliss; he was going to go away from her. She sat up, her hand against her throat to keep back the scream which she felt might come.

Dick sat down beside her and went straight through it.

"Last night Walter found me at the Club. He had a garbled telegram and we spent hours trying to get at the facts. When I came in you were asleep and I wanted you to get the sleep so that you could bear this better."

"This—this?"

"Darling, your father wired that your mother died of pneumonia at seven o'clock last night."

CHAPTER XX

MRS. WALTER WARNER, in the most elaborate of mourning clothes, ordered from New York, still held sway in her mother-in-law's house. It seemed probable that she always would be there now. Since his wife's death, Mr. Warner had come to "depend" on Walter, and if depending on Walter meant inoculating himself to the elaborate black and white (mostly white) of Walter's wife's costumes and enduring Della at his table, apparently he was able to put up with that too. Della was nice to him. She said to her friends that she meant to be "nice to poor old Mr. Warner," and proceeded to take charge of his house, enlarge his bills and with the immense insolence that was hers also began to take to herself considerable credit for doing so.

It was two months since her mother's death and for the first time Cecily felt able to begin the task of looking over her mother's personal possessions. Mr. Warner had given few directions, expressed few wishes, but on that point he had been explicit.

He had closed and locked his wife's room and said to Cecily, in giving her the key to the room and to the little safe in it—"I have taken the few things from it that I wish to have remind me of her. I have not opened the safe. The things there and the other things are yours and Dorothea's. And, of course, Cecily, you are no less my daughter. You and the boys are to share equally in my estate, which was also your mother's."

"Not now—please," answered Cecily. "I'll go over the things when I can."

As Della said to Walter, it wasn't as if Cecily could possibly wear all that jewelry herself. It seemed a kind of waste. Walter gave her one of the looks which he had learned how to give her when he was disgusted, and she tossed her head and reserved her comments for her more intimate woman friends.

So on this bright May morning Cecily sat in her mother's room on the little hassock by her mother's chaise longue and looked about her at the objects that had become freighted with memory, wondering just what her mother's inward life had been, where it had hurt her most, what she had loved most.

The lovely gowns in their chintz wrappers each brought a pang of pain. She could see her mother in them—lovely, gracious, charming, every one—and now they could no longer be given life. They were empty, meaningless decorations. The softest satins—the dresses which "looked like her mother"—she laid away in a deep mahogany chest. They were to be for Dorothea some day to carry her the spirit of a past. The dressing table fittings she would take, too, and the little objects around the room that her mother had loved to look at. She would hang that head of the Madonna, which her mother had found in Italy, at the foot of her own bed. It was a long, sad task for Cecily, but with flashes of comfort. She had the sense of being close to her mother again.

At last she opened the little wall safe which her mother had had constructed. The red jewel case of velvet was there with all but the few jewels which Mrs. Warner had worn in California and which already had been given to Cecily, to Della's disgust. There was her mother's pearl necklace which Mr. Warner had given her; the diamonds which had been the gifts of birthdays and anniversaries;

the odd, exquisite things which Mrs. Warner had brought for beauty's sake; other jewels, too, which Cecily had never seen; that other wedding ring, engraved with name and date. It gave her a stir at her heart. That wedding ring had meant her—Cecily.

A cabinet photograph of her father—handsome, queerly out of fashion. She pondered the photograph. There was a look of her little Leslie, named after Mr. Warner. Strange to have Mr. Warner's name carried on through this child who looked so much like Allgate Moore.

Envelopes with baby pictures of herself, that brought the tears to her eyes. Letters. Letters which must have been written from her father to her mother. Yes. She had kept those, then. She had wanted to preserve, even through the pain, these letters which must have been letters of love from her father. Even through the disappointment and the infidelities. It did not occur to Cecily to read them. She took them to her mother's little fireplace and burned them there. They had no meaning now to any one alive.

There were other pictures; a funny antiquated kodak picture of herself held by her father and with her mother smiling at them. They looked so happy! It hadn't been all tragedy. She picked up a ring which she knew her father had given her mother. She could remember that her mother had worn it when she was a child and that she had loved to twist it on her mother's finger. It was a deep sapphire in a low odd setting of dull gold. Cecily slipped it on her own finger.

"In memory of the happiness you gave my mother," she said to the handsome, smiling picture of Allgate Moore.

There was a knock on the closed door and Della entered forthwith.

"Nearly time for lunch, Cecily. How are you coming on? Is there anything I can do to help you?" She spoke as if Cecily were packing a trunk.

"No, thank you, Della."

"Can I see?"

There was no proper reason for refusal, but it was hard to let her see. Hastily selecting those souvenirs of the first marriage of her mother, Cecily pushed the collection of other jewelry over to Della. Della gasped.

"What a lot! Are those real pearls? And you get everything! Of course you're awfully sad, Cecily, but you certainly are a lucky girl to get all these lovely things."

Cecily did not answer.

"It's funny your mother didn't make a will. She was awfully nice to me always. I guess she was glad to have me take Walter in hand and get him out of any wild ways. Mrs. Allenby was saying the other day——"

"Was saying something about my mother?"

"Oh, I forgot you don't like her very well. I guess she's hardly your type. She's so gay. But she's awfully well liked and even if her family doesn't amount to much she always admits it. I was so surprised the night you told everybody that her cousin was your cook. Ellen's back with you, isn't she? Fliss isn't hiding it, anyway. She tells it in such a funny way."

Cecily could imagine that. She could guess how Fliss's sharp tongue could make ridicule of Cecily out of the fact that Cecily had tried to ridicule her.

"Walter and I were at her house the other night——"

"Surely, Della, you aren't going out yet; you're in mourning!"

"I can't absolutely stop seeing every one, can I?" said Della petulantly. "Of course you have to remember that

I was cheated out of a lot of things; and I was a bride and all and just beginning to be entertained for."

"Doesn't father——"

"He never says a word. No, I think he's glad to see Walter and me having a little fun. I just told Walter that I felt that his first duty was to me." She stopped and bridled. "Of course, it's your own business, Cecily, but I think you're making a mistake."

The lift of irony was in Cecily's voice. "I am?"

"Well, a man likes a good time and I should think Dick would get awfully tired sitting around so much. Fliss says that when she first knew him——"

"I can't see any point to this kind of talk," said Cecily, rising. "Did you say that lunch was ready?"

She looked a little dowdy—felt a little dowdy beside the blond completeness of Della. A disgust of all fashionable dress for mourning had made her rather deliberately choose clothes that were not only not in fashion, but which were somewhat clumsy. And she had cried a great deal and her eyes were heavy and sad. Beautiful as she was, she excited no envy in Della, except in so far as she possessed those jewels. Della knew what to envy.

Cecily's house was becoming a refuge for her. She felt it that afternoon as she went back to it. The two eldest children were out in the garden with their nurse, where the lilacs were beginning to bloom and the early green of spring was so exciting and alluring. It cheered even Cecily's rather dark mood. Spring and healthy children and a home with Dick; what was it she lacked—why was it that she and Dick lacked anything? It ought to be right—it ought to be perfect; and it wasn't right and it wasn't perfect. Was Dick cheap, or she deficient in charm? Was the clamor of light living and noise eternally to make their home discordant? She

would make it right. With her and the children, with a gayety that was not tawdry; yes, for Dick she would lighten her period of mourning. She looked back on her one talk with her mother about herself and Dick and felt that her mother would want her to make a concession to him. He had been so wonderfully kind during those first weeks. It was only lately that he had seemed restless again and surely it must be possible to swing back again to the beauty of those first years together.

She found no opening.

Dick had gone to Matthew's house for dinner, so he telephoned. "We didn't get through in time at the office," he explained, "and I thought I'd drop off here and finish what I wanted to take up with him. Children all right?"

"Quite." She hung up the receiver. It would have been just as easy to come home, but he didn't want to come especially. He wanted to go to Matthew's house. She sat through her dinner, which seemed perfectly tasteless.

That night she waited up for Dick, conscious that it was not what he would wish. He came in humming a little. She tried to look casual and succeeded in looking tragic—so tragic that the blithe smile on his face faded quickly into an annoyed concern.

"What's up?"

"Nothing. I just thought I'd read a while."

"You should be in bed. It's nearly midnight."

"I know."

"Sure nothing's wrong?"

"No."

He turned to go up the staircase, but she caught him back with a little cry.

"Dick, why aren't we like we used to be?"

He looked at her almost with dislike. "Isn't it late for psychological discussion? What do you mean?"

She faced him with the question which was clamoring in her mind, tugging at her heart all the time.

"Dick—do you love me?"

It jarred on him unspeakably—this forcing of emotion.

"Isn't that rather an unnecessary question?"

"I'm afraid it isn't."

"I wish you wouldn't be so high strung all the time, Cecily. I realize you've had a bad time lately; in fact, it seems to me you've had a bad time ever since we were married. But it does wear on me—this atmosphere of tragedy."

"Then why must we have it? It wasn't like that when we were first married."

He took an impatient turn up and down the room.

"No. But you can't maintain a honeymoon attitude all your life, my dear. I don't suppose we feel the same way towards each other as we did then."

That hurt. "But why don't we?"

"Why, we're older; people's emotions cool naturally."

"But they shouldn't if they love one another."

"There you go, you see. You want to have everything your way. You want to force things. You don't let life be natural, Cecily. You're too romantic."

The tears in her eyes only irritated him. He went on, thinking that it might be as well to have it out with her.

"I don't want to be unkind, but you have the most artificial view of things sometimes. You can't tolerate any thing or person that isn't on a pedestal."

"No, it isn't that, Dick. I just hate to see things slip into cheapness."

"But almost everything normal to you is cheap."

"No! All I want is to have you love me and the children—be content with us."

"You're quite absurd, Cecily. I love the children as much as any man could. If it's hard to love you it's because you scare me off by frowning upon every harmless diversion—by wanting to shut us up together. That isn't the way people live nowadays. Marriage isn't prison. The trouble with us is that we aren't congenial in our pursuits. You like one kind of thing. I like another. And you won't admit my kind of thing at all."

"I don't want marriage to be prison, but if marriage is anything surely it's the concentration of two people on making a home and bringing up their children." She couldn't add love.

"It's a lot more than that nowadays, Cecily. I suppose that used to be all that was expected of a woman—having her children and keeping her house clean. Now things have broadened. Men need more, ask more; so do most women."

"I suppose," said Cecily, coldly, "what you mean is that men want a lot of noise and dissipation and promiscuous flirtations, and that they expect their wives to tolerate and join them in such things."

The scorn in her voice drove Dick on. "Well, perhaps the woman who is willing to do that gets away with marriage better than the woman who clings to an outworn domesticity. I know your scorn of Della—and of girls like Della and Fliss. We aren't any happier than Fliss and Matthew, or Della and Walter."

Cecily became purely instinctive. She burst into tears and tried to talk through them.

"Then the fact that I have three children and they have none doesn't make any difference to you?"

"The children are beside the point. I'm glad we have them; so are you. But you can't justify everything, ex-

cuse all unhappiness, swallow yourself up, even in children. For God's sake be reasonable, Cecily. Stick to the point at issue."

But she couldn't. She lost her case, sadly undeveloped as it was, by her rapidly mounting hysteria. It ended by her being put to bed, being soothed by Dick, assured of things which he didn't mean in his heart and which she knew he didn't mean—by the sleep of exhaustion and day of shamed apology which followed for both of them.

CHAPTER XXI

IT could not last too long after that, but they ran the whole gamut of possible moods. There were times when the antagonism between them seemed to one or the other so intangible, so imaginary as to be ludicrous; days when the air seemed cleared of dissension and unhappiness; any incident could alter the whole shape of things for them. Some new delight in the progress of the children, some anniversary which it seemed too cruel to let pass in anger, would make them both happy. But they never quite relaxed, never quite felt faith in each other. And the most trivial thing could upset their balance—a fancied slight, a casual statement which was translated into a criticism. On their guard constantly, neither of them felt peace.

The days were absorbing for Dick just at this time, too. In July Matthew had unexpectedly yielded to the pressure upon him to become a candidate for United States Senator to fill the unexpired term of the incumbent who had just died. He had refused many political honors and opportunities before, but this time the political situation looked so black that he could not justify refusal. He knew his usefulness well in a state where blind conservatism and dangerous dissatisfaction were in constant ferment; and his acquaintance and high standing among all kinds of men made his nomination fairly certain. But his decision left Dick alone and depressed. It was not that he did not approve of Matthew's action, but that they had come to depend upon each other more

and more in business. They had worked out the development of the mines together lately. With Matthew away for even a part of the year, responsibility would fall very heavily on Dick, and things were far from satisfactory. A spreading sense of loneliness encompassed Dick. He tried to satisfy himself in the children, but an hour's play with them, refreshing and delightful as it was, did not give him all he sought or all he needed. Gradually there came silent moods in which he spent most of his hours of relaxation and which were only broken by a plunge into business or into the midst of some noisy party at which Cecily might or might not join him. It did not matter whether she did or not. He was tied to the sense of her instinctive criticism of many of the things he liked and she to her sense of failure.

They were both much interested in Matthew's campaign. That gave them something to talk about and something to focus a mutual interest upon. But Cecily was suffering even more from a fear of Matthew's departure than was Dick. Since her mother had died, she, like Dick, had been lonely, but that did not help them to find refuge in each other. Matthew and, curiously enough, Ellen, were the only people in whom Cecily felt there was comprehension of her and approval. She had one conversation with Mother Fénelon when she and Dick reached the breaking point.

"There's no reason for this," said Mother Fénelon. "You are a good woman and your husband is a good man. You have duties to each other."

"Virtue and duties are the least part of marriage to-day, Mother Fénelon. You can't manage with just those things. You have to use the modern methods. It's a science to-day to have a husband."

"Marriage is what it always has been."

"I'm afraid not. It's altered with the jazz band and the servant problem and the 'keep young' crusade."

There was more, but to no purpose. The break came immediately after Matthew's election. Reaction helped perhaps, as did the fact that little by little every one had come to guess that the young Harrisons were unhappy and Della and Madeline and others had come to give Cecily advice.

"You've humiliated me beyond all decency," Cecily told Dick bitterly. "There's no dignity, no privacy left between us."

"Then I'd better go," answered Dick.

She weakened then, but it was all useless and in her mind she knew that Dick must go, that they could not keep on this rending life, which was exhausting them both. Dick went to his club. He wanted to leave the city, but with Matthew's departure imminent he couldn't. And with Dick's definite action bruited about, the young Harrisons became the favorite topic for discussion—discussion which carried its probing back to tales of the first unhappy marriage of Mrs. Warner and made strange and foolish deductions.

Mr. Warner, after listening for an hour to Della, who brought the news home and philosophized extempore on just what Cecily's mistake had been, took his hat and proceeded to Cecily's house. It was the day on which the few personal effects which Dick needed had left the house. She met her stepfather in the living-room, rising from a dusky corner where she was sitting with her hands in her lap, strangely idle. The soft white silk of her dress was hardly whiter than her face.

Mr. Warner put his hat and cane down slowly and went towards her, taking both her hands.

"My poor Cecily."

She did not show any sign of collapse or tears. It

seemed to him that she was broken, but the impression did not come from her appearance or her voice.

"Dick thought he'd better go."

He sat down and tapped on the arms of his chair, an old man habit that had come over him lately.

"Do you want a divorce from Dick, Cecily?"

"Not now. Neither of us wants that now. We're too—raw." She shuddered.

"And you're going to live here alone?"

"Here, with the children."

"How is Dick going to do without the children?"

"I think he can. He can't bear living with me for the sake of them and I must have them."

"Ah, Cecily, this won't last. You and Dick are a pair of naughty children. I've a notion to go down to the club and bring him home by the ear."

Cecily stiffened. "Promise me you won't do anything like that! Don't make it begin all over again now. We've tried and tried, and we can't."

"But what is it? Is this nonsense Della talks about Dick's wanting to go out more and your refusing the actual reason you've dared to break up your home?"

"That's what people will say," answered Cecily, "but of course that's just a symptom of what's the matter with us. The trouble is that we don't think marriage means the same thing; we don't mean the same thing by it. And every outward expression of my idea jars on him—and his on me. We've become angry and furtive and quarrelsome and condemning."

"And yet I'll bet you will be reconciled within a month. Perhaps sooner. It may be that this little separation is just what you both need to straighten out all this trouble."

"Reconciled! Reconciled!" repeated Cecily. "We've been reconciled a dozen times in the past year. No, father, that won't do it."

He sat silent for a while and she watched from the window in a strange, still way.

"It's not right nor necessary. I wish your mother were here."

"I wouldn't like her to see me a failure," said Cecily with that note of complete depression.

"Don't be foolish. You're not a failure. How could any one with three fine, husky children be a failure?"

"It's not enough to make success."

She rose after a little and offered him a cigar.

"Some Dick left."

"He'll be back after them," said Mr. Warner.

She smiled, but it was a tragic little smile.

"You'll have to smile better than that for the children."

"I will—for them."

"Then why not for Dick?"

"Dick doesn't care for me."

"Dick does."

She gave the dreariest little gesture of negation.

"You and your mother are curiously alike, Cecily."

"No."

"I have often wondered," he went on ruminatively after a moment, "if there wasn't something of a case for Allgate Moore. Of course he treated your mother badly. She never even told me about it, but we all knew. After I married your mother—and I was an older man with somewhat cool judgments, my share of discretion and years of experience—I wondered about him sometimes. Because I had a hard time understanding your mother and a hard time being good to her."

"But you were good to her."

"After I had learned how; after I had studied and planned how, so that I might not shock her or frighten her or disgust her or hurt her. You are like her—fastidious, delicate minded, not delicate only in mood, but deli-

cate always. You like fine things and beautiful things. So do most men, but most men like other things too. Your mother could not tolerate in any one what was un-beautiful or coarse—many human things.”

“But she could, for she told me to be tolerant.”

Mr. Warner moved a little in the shadow which had fallen on his chair.

“That’s what I taught her,—what I tried to teach her so that contacts would not be too hard for her.”

“What if contacts are hard? Isn’t it better to preserve truth, to live according to beauty—not to be cheap? I know how silly, how common it all sounds, will sound; the things they will say about Dick and me. But it isn’t true that trivialities have made the trouble. It’s big things, basic things. I don’t want to compromise with an age that seems all wrong in its standards. I can’t bear to form myself on people like Della and Fliss.”

“It wouldn’t do you any good to try that,” said Mr. Warner with a chuckle, “but I wish, my dear, that your humor was a little nearer the surface and that it could come to your assistance when you are unhappy as well as when you are happy.”

“It’s queer about that. I can only see things black and white—happy or sad. It’s a great drawback. Sometimes I try to pretend, but it’s always so easy to see through my pretense.”

Mr. Warner was pursuing his previous line of thought.

“You and your mother are such women as foster the ideals men have about women—if they have any—making ideals for the home which every man treasures or respects. But it’s hard for men to live by their ideals alone and you demand that.”

“I don’t understand it at all,” said Cecily, wearily, “why an effort to keep things close to the ideal men promise you before they marry you should end in failure.”

"If it is failure; but I don't believe it is. I don't think you've hit the real reason for it. Cecily, is there any third person involved in this?"

"Woman, you mean?"

He nodded.

"Not in the way you mean. We disagree awfully over one woman whom Dick admires,—Fliss Allenby."

"He's not in love with her."

"No. That makes it all the worse. If he were you could understand his taking up her defense every time a criticism of her is made. But as a matter of fact he prefers even her—for whom he doesn't care and whom I can remember his scorning when I first took her up after we were married—to me. He prefers almost anything to me."

"Don't get bitter, Cecily."

"I didn't know what that word meant except abstractly seven years ago. Now it seems to express me."

"Nonsense. Turn on the lights, my dear. We're too gloomy."

The conversation became more practical.

"Have you made any money arrangement with Dick?"

"I don't want any money from Dick. If he's not living with me, I don't want his money. I couldn't bear to touch it."

"That's quixotic, my dear, but if you won't take his, you must let me help."

"I've a little of my own, you know," said Cecily.

"As I remember, very little."

"Three thousand a year. Lots of people live on that."

"How much have you and Dick been spending?"

"About twenty-five thousand. But that was with cars and all sorts of luxuries. We'll just do without those and I won't need new clothes for a long time, nor will the children."

"And when you do?"

"Well, we'll have to do without them. Or maybe I could earn some money. Anyway I will not touch Dick's money and I won't take yours either, father, please. I couldn't let you support me—and Della."

"Cecily!"

"That was horrid, wasn't it? Well, please let me get along as best I can. Let me be honest with myself."

"You are making it so hard for Dick."

"Yes. He seemed to take that part much harder than any other. It was the only thing that really seemed to worry him—not to be able to salve things over with money. If he sends me money, I shall send it back."

Mr. Warner rose.

"I'm going now, my dear. I can't tell you how sorry I am about this or how convinced I am that it won't last. I want you to let me help you. I want to come and talk to you now and then."

"Yes, please do that. I shall be lonely once in a while," she said bravely.

"You don't mind all the silly talk?"

Cecily shrugged. "I shan't hear it. No, I don't think I do, except for Dick a little."

"Would you like to go away for the rest of the year?"

"I thought of that, but it doesn't seem wise to take the children away just now. And that, too, would be expensive."

Mr. Warner went down the street slowly, tapping the darkened pavement with his cane.

"I don't care to discuss it, Fliss. It's none of our business."

"I hope not," said Fliss.

Matthew frowned at her and she laughed at him.

"You should see the frantic interest of people whose business it most certainly is not."

"That's easy to imagine," he answered. "But I don't care to be in their class."

She went on, "Cecily, you know, who has been really not of paramount interest to any one lately, is now the real center of thought. Why she did and why he didn't and what was the matter and how long it has been going on and if Dick's stenographer is really involved or if it's Cecily's iceman——"

"Spare me that stuff, Fliss."

"I haven't been spared. I've had it all day. But seriously, Matthew, what is the matter with that fool girl? Why doesn't she appreciate what she's got?"

"Does he appreciate what he's got?"

"United States Senator judicial temperament bound to see both sides. Well, why doesn't some one open both the kittens' eyes if they can't appreciate each other?"

He turned to look at her. "You're pleased about all this, aren't you?"

"Well, perhaps just a little satisfied in my heart. Cecily made me the butt of the town for weeks with that Ellen stuff. Do you blame me for a little human nature?"

"I don't blame you for anything, Fliss. I accept you."

"And Cecily?"

"I said that was none of our business."

"Then why spend so long composing notes to her last night?"

He looked at her accusingly.

"In the wastebasket, my dear. I don't always go over it, but I was so interested. Evidently you hadn't gone very far with any of the notes."

"Once in a while I think that nothing but a spanking, Fliss——"

"Wife-beater!"

"I'll write my notes downtown after this, you know."

"I suppose so. I'll have to bribe the janitor to save

me the wastebaskets. Well, if you won't talk about Cecily, let's talk about Washington. I get a little weak in the knees when I think of all I'll have to learn. I don't mean to get too many clothes, either. But the ones I do get——"

"I was wondering if I hadn't better go on alone at first. I could get a bit adjusted and I can't see how you can leave your mother."

Her face clouded. "I know, Matthew. I seem a heartless brute, but there's nothing I can do; and she gets so irritated at me now; and whenever I go there and try to do anything she and Mrs. Ellis are hobnobbing over horrors in that dreadful way and everything is so awful. Matthew, don't leave me with them!"

"Why, no, you'd have your own house. It would only be for a little while. But I'll take you if you want to go so badly. I do get a little sorry for your father. He's——"

"But I tell you there's nothing I can do for him. I have tried! But I can't sit through endless hours of moving pictures and silence."

"Well, dear, you can't help if you feel like that. It is probably true you could do nothing."

"Where are you going to-night?"

"Going to work unless you need me."

"No, I told Polly Angell that I thought you couldn't come to dinner and she asked me to come anyway. She found an extra man."

"Ames?"

Fliss nodded.

"You ought to leave him alone. What do you get out of it?"

But she parried his question with a laugh. "Well, you told me that *you* wouldn't make love to me. I have to have some one."

"Run along—and behave yourself."

She left his room and going down to the library, picked up the Washington evening papers, turning to the page which gave the social news. Over that she bent a puckered brow, studying names.

BOOK THREE

BOOK THREE

CHAPTER XXII

THERE was no doubt that at the start the break meant peace to Cecily. That was what surprised her so much. She had tortured herself in advance with the thought of those nervous stresses which she imagined would follow Dick's leaving. But they did not materialize. There were a few very bad nights at first. Then came a sleep of exhaustion and after that a night when to her surprise she slept naturally and although, when she woke, the sick feeling of impending trouble and past trouble was still upon her, she was rested. There were hours of choking hysteria when it took more courage than she had ever guessed she had to keep from seeking Dick out, begging him to come back—on any terms—only to relieve the terrible loneliness without him. Days when she felt strangely light and queer and at the end of things as if the emptiness of her soul were swallowing her up; days when the sight of her own strange, strainedly sad eyes and thin face horrified her. The physical pain and exhaustion which went with the mental struggle seemed sometimes unbearable. The children looked strange and seemed remote at times. And yet, little by little, usage, duties, routine began to pull her back to normal. Her emotions wore themselves out battering against her resistance and she commenced to live again.

Half life, she told herself, without sparkle, with no joy, but none the less ordered. She commenced to read

a little and the ability to focus her mind on an impersonal situation came back. Reading was almost her only diversion. The few people whom she saw at her own home were her only companions and the only two of those who gave her real companionship were her stepfather and Agatha Ward, whose literary modernism had a kind of solace in it because it grouped her case with so many others. Not that she talked about her trouble to Agatha, but Agatha talked of life and of strange, new, shifting points of view to her. If Agatha had a point of approach to all the currents of life other than that of analysis she never showed it. Under her touch Cecily was able now and then to depersonalize herself, see herself as a "case"—as a situation created by the turmoil of modern things—and it invariably gave her some comfort. The moments of intellectual broadening did not last, but they helped.

Matthew she had not seen. He had written her a note which was brief and careful, asking her if there was anything that he could do for her and she had replied briefly:

"Nothing, thank you, Matthew. There is nothing for any one to do except be sorry for the fact that we are not always brave and wise. Come to see me when you can. Talking to you always helps me. Faithfully yours, Cecily Harrison."

Matthew read that note again and again and then, not putting it into his pocket, perhaps for fear of the mocking eye of Fliss, he tore it across and dropped it thoughtfully into the wastebasket. He did not go to see her at once.

So with the routine, the care of the house and the increasingly interesting children, a month wore on. At the end of the month a letter from Dick came, enclosing a check for her usual allowance. She sent it back with a

note which she tried to make not too curt, reiterating that she must live on her own money and that she had plenty. Then she went into her own room and there, with her check book and a pencil, made various budgets to figure out just how she could manage to cut her expenses to a fourth of their usual amount. That, it appeared, must be done—or if not she would have to take money from Dick or her stepfather. She wouldn't do that, she was resolved. The decision not to take Dick's money helped her self-respect enormously. If he was not to live with her she was not going to be supported by him. Dick's incensed, insulted arguments on that point—that he had a right to support his children and that she had no right to prevent him—made no impression on the fixity of her decision.

"I couldn't do it, Dick," she told him, as they were trying to have a "calm" discussion a few days before he went. "Don't you see that it would be shameful? You're getting nothing from me—nothing from the children and there's something in taking money from a man with whom you aren't living that puts you in a sordid class."

"But I did get so much—I did get everything——"

"You don't owe anything for that; please don't drag money into it, Dick. I couldn't—I couldn't ever take it. Love is a gift; children are a gift; you can't settle for them in——"

"I'm not trying to," cried Dick, "but don't you see that for you and for them to get along without things that they have a right to have is ridiculous!"

But she was stubborn. She sent back his first check without an instant's thought of changing her position, although expenses already were beginning to trouble her. That strength which her mother had known was in her had already begun to bolster up her actions and her resolves.

She took counsel with Ellen.

"Do you think that if I did the upstairs work and took all the care of the children we could get along with just you and a laundress? Now that the family is smaller and since we shall be very quiet we might be able to manage it, don't you think so?"

"I'd be glad," said Ellen. "There's not so much work as there used to be and now that you are taking so much care of the babies those nurses have time heavy on their hands."

So the nurse and the housemaid problem was solved for Cecily by her getting along without them and the extra activity which was necessary for her helped her to fill many hours which might have been terribly disconsolate. That saved a hundred dollars a month for her.

She scraped her budget closer and closer. Cards from exclusive shops showing children's clothes or gowns for herself went into the wastebasket. She went to the public library instead of to the booksellers for her books. Yet, in spite of all she tried to do and all she actually did accomplish she could not cut far enough to make her little income cover expenses. She was running behind at the end of the first month. Recalculations made her do a little better for a week after that. Then the baby had a week's illness of no particular seriousness, but Cecily found herself confronting a presumable bill from the child specialist which would throw her budget into chaos again. She used the thousand dollars her father had given her for Christmas to bring her checking account up to normal and that exhausted her cash reserves.

There was a certain interest and pleasure in working it out, however. Work was almost her only refuge and it was one which she sought with redoubled interest and comfort constantly.

The mind which had been latent for so long began to develop as it was trained upon real problems and as she

made herself independent, her own protector and her own refuge.

The moments when she was panic-stricken for want of a refuge—when she needed Dick or her mother to solve things, to smooth life over—became fewer and fewer. It amazed her to find how dependent she had been, to see how many things Dick had taken off her hands. That he still wanted to do them she knew, for there were rather pathetic attempts to pay garage bills; a watchdog was presented to her by her father, but she somehow guessed from the phrasing of the note that came with it that it had been Dick's thought and that her father wanted her to know it. Such things hurt. It wasn't that it made her feel more hopeful about herself and Dick. But she usually wanted to feel that Dick was happy and benefited by leaving her, and such things made her wonder. Then in the bitter, contradictory hours when she did not want him to be happy and when the resentment at the wreck of her own happiness scourged her, she was angry that he should attempt even anonymous courtesies.

After a little the moods grew less bitter. But one bitterness never grew less. The sight of such frivolities as had wrecked Dick and herself, the mention of them, the sight of the people involved in them—could always bring back a rush of poison through her mind. That had cut her off completely from Della. Her mother's house had changed. It was no longer the spacious, comfortable, somewhat quiet house of Mrs. Warner's planning, at least not to Cecily, though a casual observer would have noticed few changes. Della had pervaded the house with herself. At first Cecily made a protest here and there, but her protests were against trifles and it was impossible to explain to her stepfather or to Walter why little things like irregular hours for meals, like the careless and indiscriminate use of linens (Della could not waste her time

over a lot of sheets and pillow-cases, she said), were a violation of her mother's spirit. Cecily felt that the men thought her trivial and she soon came seldom to the house now ruled by Della, except to bring the children to see Mr. Warner. Walter and she were rather definitely estranged. She came in one morning at eleven o'clock to find Walter eating breakfast in a bathrobe, weary, red-eyed and unshaven. He explained crossly and with an aggressive note of defense that they had been up until all hours. Cecily was silent and her glance as she looked at him and the disordered breakfast room was only discouraged, but it must have shamed Walter into bravado.

She was standing there when Della came in. Della was wearing an extravagant negligee and looking untidy, but delightfully pretty. At sight of Cecily she threw up her hands.

"Good Heavens, Cecily, this is no morning for you to drop in and catch us at our worst. We'll shock her, Walter. Now don't you scold him, Cecily. He was tired and I let him sleep."

She settled down on the arm of Walter's chair and he pushed back from the table, pulling her down into his arms. Disheveled and laughingly protesting, Della let him hold her. Cecily turned away, trying to be light.

"Too domestic a party for me. I only wanted to see if I could find the second volume of a novel father lent me. I'll hunt for it?"

"Go ahead. Try his room if it isn't in the library."

Cecily left them and with the closing of the door, Della settled herself more comfortably.

"I think we really shocked her, dearie."

"Nonsense," said Walter, looking down at the bundle of lace and ribbons which should have been so alluring. "Nonsense." He passed a hand over his chin and kissed

her without much interest. "Get up, honey; I've got to get dressed."

It was such little things which isolated Cecily. She did not go to her father's house again for weeks. She was apologetic for being a drawback and yet she could not enter into so many of the things the others made their habits. The knowledge, too, that Della felt that Cecily had made a mess of things and that all her sympathies were with Dick kept her away. The thought of Della as her critic was intolerable to her pride.

Shut off from her own family, she was equally shut off from Dick's mother. Mrs. Harrison had been away at the time of the actual break and she was humiliated by it all. Most seriously of all was she hurt by the fact that Dick had gone to his club and not home to her. When he did come to her he absolutely refused to discuss the situation. So Mrs. Harrison went to Cecily and found it equally hard to get information from her.

"You're the talk of the town—you and Dick—and both of you mute. What is the trouble? Has Dick been misbehaving himself?"

"No," answered Cecily. "No, indeed, Mrs. Harrison. It is just that we don't seem very happy and I thought—we hoped it would be better for us if we separated."

"But without a reason!"

"We don't agree about marriage. It's so impossible to explain."

"Is this stuff I hear about your refusing to go into society true? Or is it true that Dick is enamored of this Mrs. Allenby?"

That struck fire. "It is quite true that Dick and I did not agree about the kind of society we cared to enter. What there is in any feeling for Mrs. Allenby is really for Dick to say, Mrs. Harrison."

"It's ridiculous. He's not in love with that young woman."

"He prefers her type of woman to what he calls the domestic type," answered Cecily coldly. There was nothing in this little woman, so annoyed about scandal, to excite any pity or kindly feeling in her at all.

Mrs. Harrison rose, tapping her fingers nervously on her bag.

"It's an extremely unfortunate situation. I would be prepared to give you every support, Cecily, if I believed that Dick had misbehaved himself at all. But if you have thrown him over, broken up his home for the sake of a—a theory, it is one of the most cruel and unnecessary things I have ever heard of. Men are men. They demand a little amusement. If you refuse to allow him that you must expect——"

"Please, Mrs. Harrison. There's nothing to be gained by all this, surely."

The little woman drove off, her angry, alert little head looking straight ahead through the window of her limousine.

"Didn't Grandmother Harrison bring me anything?" asked Dorothea, running in a little too late to speak to her grandmother.

"Not to-day, dear. She was in a hurry."

"She neatly always does," said Dorothea, with some disappointment.

Cecily regarded her daughter with some worry as she climbed up to see if she could catch a glimpse of the departing car from the window. She often wondered how she was going to explain all this to the children. Would they understand or would they, like Della, blame her, or, like Mrs. Harrison and her father, think she was foolish?

"But I didn't do it," she protested to herself. "It was

Dick who insisted. I couldn't keep him from going. Unless I was willing to throw everything in life which seems worth while to me into the discard. Everything that is worth while to anybody. The standards of life that must be maintained." She thought of Della, a mass of provocative lingerie. She did not want this sturdy little figure in blue linen to grow up to be like that. If one had to give up everything to prevent Dorothea's becoming like that, it was worth it. The extravagance of her conclusions did not strike her as false just then. She topped her sacrifice with some self-glorification, and taking Dorothea out into the garden, played with her until dinner time.

But in the empty evening she found the self-glory fading. She was alone. She had failed.

It was often like that.

CHAPTER XXIII

MRS. HORTON'S death came just before the time when Matthew had planned to leave for Washington. A succession of complications had hastened it. Three days before it came, Fliss knew that it was imminent and she spent those days sitting beside her mother for long periods, her face white and drawn, but her courage sustained as it always was in a crisis.

Death seemed on no great errand here in this shabby little flat, breaking no heart, effecting no terrible cleavage. Yet the solemnity of the struggle was not altered by the fact that it was only a commonplace, middle-aged woman who was fighting for the chance to keep on going to the moving pictures, gossiping, living in trivialities. Death, disregarding human gradations of importance, was choosing this soul gravely, solemnly. And Fliss, shivering a little by her mother's bed, watched and learned, and perhaps in her quick, practical way got a firmer grip on life from this first intimacy with death.

She would have nothing to do with the funeral arrangements. Until the end she had stayed by her mother, but after it was over and her mother was gone, Ellen and Mrs. Ellis managed the details of burial. Mr. Horton remained unobtrusive. Vaguely encouraging his wife, he had also stayed beside her and she had turned to him rather than to Fliss. Later he went out and bought a box of red carnations, giving them to Ellen to arrange near his wife.

"She always liked carnations," he said.

Fliss was very gentle to him and very anxious to make him comfortable, but it was soon clear to every one that the boarding house where Mrs. Ellis lived and where a remnant of friends of his early married life still stayed was the best solution. He obviously preferred it so and Mrs. Ellis had him under her charge. In two weeks there was nothing left of the Horton household in the flat, and Fliss, her spirits rising in their characteristic way, made her plans for Washington and prepared to close her own house. She did not see much of Matthew now, for he was absorbed in work that kept him busy night and day. Much of it she knew was with Dick, but Dick did not come to her house. They had met once or twice in Matthew's office when she had gone in to see her husband, but that was all. Dick had been carefully casual in his manner, and Fliss flippant as usual. To see the three of them together for those few moments would never have been to guess at the clashes and attractions which were between them.

If Fliss wondered whether Matthew had seen Cecily and deliberately kept herself from inquiring, she was rewarded by his asking her one night a week before their departure, "Shall we go to see Cecily for a moment to-night?"

Knowing what he wanted and expected, she answered as he would wish.

"Can't. I have a caller. But you go."

He said nothing more. After dinner, though she tried to detain him in spite of her permission, he went out early. Fliss frowned a little and then prepared to receive her caller.

Matthew went along swiftly like a man overcoming irresolution. He was walking instead of driving and the night air, full of the chill of early autumn, seemed to in-

vigorate him. At Cecily's house Ellen took his hat and told him that Mrs. Harrison was in. He had last seen Ellen at Mrs. Horton's bedside.

"You fit in well here, Ellen," he said, looking about at the quiet, spacious house which seemed too quiet. "I hope you're planning to stay, now."

"Yes, I am going to stay," she answered. "Mrs. Harrison needs me."

She turned to go, but on impulse he called her back.

"Ellen, if Mrs. Harrison ever needs me, if she ever needs a man and you know it, will you send me word? Mrs. Allenby and I are off to Washington next week."

"Yes. That's what Mr. Harrison asked me, too."

She might have said more, but Cecily herself came down the staircase, a little surprised at the sight of her visitor. She held out both hands and drew him into the long living-room before the fire.

"I hoped you wouldn't go away without coming to see me."

"Of course not. How are you?"

All was casual. But they could not keep it up. After a little there was silence and as the silence ripened, they knew they could speak of anything.

"Things have changed since we first sat in this room, Matthew. When Dick used to sit over in that chair and we all used to talk about everything in the world. And since then have come wars and babies and now Dick's gone. How is he, Matthew?"

"Pretty fit. A little thinner. Working hard."

She paused for a moment, and then went on with a little laugh:

"I have so much to say that I can't afford to be reflective. So much to ask. What is the matter with us all, Matthew?"

"I've tried to figure it out myself. You mean about you and Dick?"

"Why I failed." He could see her hands pressing themselves together. "Why Dick stopped caring for me."

"I don't think he did."

"Oh, yes. He didn't care when he left. We had nothing left at all except memories. We jarred on each other all the time."

"And has this been peace since you parted?"

"It has not been happiness or even satisfaction. I keep on expecting happiness right around the corner. Then I turn the corner and find loneliness."

"If you and Dick could only get at the root of all this and dig it out."

"We tried, but we couldn't. There was no single root. It was just basic difference in ideals. He wasn't with me in demanding greater dignity from life—does that sound foolish? And I was jealous of Fliss."

"Not really, Cecily. That would be nonsense."

"I didn't suspect Dick of a love affair with Fliss, of course. But I couldn't bear his admiration of her and of Della. I couldn't bear to have him even tolerate them. It sounds small, Matthew, but I wanted him with me—with me completely. I couldn't go on with him at all if we weren't together. Yet now it isn't peace; it's quiet, that's all. And I shall go on into middle age. I'm middle-aged now and I'm only twenty-six."

Matthew leaned forward and took one of her hands gently, naturally.

"Do you know that Fliss is jealous of you?" he asked.

"Of me! Not any more!"

"Always will be. Because she knows that you have a part of men's souls that she can never reach. I wouldn't tell you this if I didn't think you needed it. But when

I asked Fliss to marry me she said I was in love with you. I wanted her to marry me. I wanted all her sparkle and charm and gayety. I needed it. So I told her. And she said I was in love with you; that she had read it in my face every time I looked at you. So finally I said that even admitting that and refusing to discuss it, I wanted her to marry me. And we have had a very good time together. But she knows that I always have carried about with me——”

“Don’t, Matthew.”

“I must, just once. I’m going away. I know that it isn’t going to hurt you or do me any good. But if you thought that there was the faintest chance that I could do you any good—help you at all with my love—I’d carry you off to-morrow.”

Then all the invisible little bonds which had grown between them in six years tightened suddenly and all Matthew’s repressions and evasions crumbled. For one moment bigger than all reason, he held her against his heart and as he bent his head to hers Cecily looked up at the man who understood her and thought with her and for her and she trusted herself to the comfort of his arms, while he said foolish, shaken things and broke off to press his lips into the soft hollow of her neck.

Then she drew away, but very, very gently.

“It’s a terrible confusion, isn’t it? There’s nothing for us; little for you and Fliss; and nothing for Dick and me. All our lives are tangled up together and we can’t straighten it out.”

The dream had not quite gone from Matthew’s eyes as he looked down at her soft, flushed cheeks and the waves of dark hair.

“You think we couldn’t, you and I, for each other?”

“I’ve three children, Matthew. I couldn’t start over.”

“I’d love the children. It would all be arranged so

easily—so quickly. You'd not need to have the slightest embarrassment or pain. And to bring you happiness, Cecily—to keep you in the midst of the happiness you deserve and need—might be what only I could do. I'd try, dear."

Cecily sat silent, her hands pressed against her face. Whether it was pity or hesitation or horror that she felt he could not tell. But to-night Matthew was not a philosopher, but a man with intense desires and hopes. He pressed his advantage.

"After it was settled we'd be able to go away—away to places you've never seen—we'd learn about the world together."

He wanted to take her in his arms again, but she gave him no opportunity.

"It wouldn't do," she said swiftly. "I'm sure it wouldn't do. Just for a moment, Matthew, you thought it would. But you and I couldn't do that sort of thing and you know it as well as I do. We're not the kind of persons who can build happiness out of wrongs."

"But what are the wrongs?"

"Wrongs to Fliss and to Dick—even if we don't think they'd care much. I'm sure, Matthew. There was a moment when I was doubtful about it, but I'm not doubtful any more. There are times, I suppose, when that sort of thing is justified—if a woman loves a man enough. But——"

He did not let her finish. "Don't say it, Cecily. I know. But I'd rather not have you say it. Forget it all. For a moment while you were doubtful I sailed among the clouds. It was my big personal moment. Now I'm back on the earth and there I'll stay. I'll go to Washington and fumble around among the tangles of the country's affairs and if I'm lucky perhaps I'll untie some little knot in the great tangle. And I'll be glad all

the time that you are alive and that the world is enriched by you."

"It will be so lonely without you. Even when I don't see much of you, just to know that you are here is a comfort."

"I'll always be ready to come on demand, you know, Cecily. What I hope is that you can fight your way through this. You mustn't expect things to clear perfectly and absolutely. The best any one of us gets is a ray of hope and enlightenment now and then. You may have to compromise—even if it hurts you. But you won't have to compromise your ideals, Cecily—just the manner of putting them over."

She had fallen back into her chair and sat there looking at the fire.

"I'm going now."

Cecily made a bewildered gesture of protest. He turned to the door, but she sprang up, hurrying after him.

"It will be so terrible alone—again. Don't go."

Her hands were stretched out towards him in appeal and they faced each other trembling. Then Matthew's voice came—unnatural, shaken:

"I can't stay now, Cecily. It would only make you more wretched."

She heard the door close and was alone in the warm, softly lit room, helplessly sobbing.

Matthew hurried along as if trying to escape from the thoughts or suggestions that pursued him. Through the darkened streets, choosing side streets for his progress, almost stumbling in his absorption, he walked for miles, apparently seeing nothing, all the keenness of observation that was usual with him obscured in his face. It was midnight when he reached his home, and entering softly, went upstairs. The light from Fliss's room shone

bright into the hallway. He was passing when she called him back.

"Late, aren't you, Matthew?"

He stood silhouetted in her doorway, looking unkempt and worn. Fliss was at her dressing table brushing the luxuriant hair of which she was so proud. She looked at him curiously.

"Where on earth have you been to look like that?"

"Like what? I took a walk and it's damp outside."

"You certainly must have walked," commented Fliss.

"Sit down here and rest and talk to me."

"I'm tired. I think I'll go along to bed."

"How's Cecily?"

"Very fine."

"Glad to see you."

"She's always cordial."

"Not very expansive are you, darling? Well, sit down anyway. I want to tell you about my evening. I've had an exciting one."

"Who was here?"

"Gordon."

"That must have passed the time."

"Gordon was very trying to-night. Excitable."

He looked at her curiously as she brushed out the black, shining lengths. For the first time since he came in he seemed to see her as something other than an obstacle.

"What was he excitable about?"

"Me. He wanted me—to make love to me."

"Oh, my God!" said Matthew, laughing as if the thing that amused him was not at all funny.

"Amused?"

"I was laughing at the foolishness of men, Fliss."

"Not so foolish," said Fliss, drily. "He was very much in earnest. And as it happens that he cares a lot

I was almost tempted to pack my bag. What would you have done?"

"Gone after you."

She looked around at him skeptically. "Well, anyway I didn't run. I called that whole business off. Told him there was nothing doing at all. He won't be back."

"Why did you lead him such a dance, Fliss? He's such a nice young fellow."

"Well, you see"—Fliss contemplated her image in the glass—"I was doing my best to make you jealous. But you wouldn't fall for it, old thing. Now tell me what you were doing. Trying to get Cecily to run off with you?"

At that random shot Matthew stiffened angrily. "Good-night."

"So you won't tell me about your escapades even if I tell you about mine?" said Fliss, imperturbably. But he had gone. She saw the face in her mirror lose its lightness and get hard and a little bitter. Then she brushed on. It was good for the hair.

Later he came in and kissed her and patted her head thoughtfully.

"I've been thinking, Fliss," he said to her, "that since you are to be in Washington you need a few more things. Most of the women must have a lot more jewels than you have. How about coming down to-morrow and treating yourself?"

"But I thought you were preaching economy for the nation."

"I am. And I mean it. But I'd like to do this."

She took her cue, though the droop in her voice belied the gayety of her words.

"All right, darling. Hang me with diamonds and watch me sparkle."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE trouble with the country just now," said Matthew, making a farewell talk to the Chamber of Commerce, "is that it's absolutely unfitted nervously to stand any strain or excitement. So long as things go well with us we are full of enthusiasm, but the suggestion of trouble upsets everything—frightens every one. We are unconsciously proceeding on the basis that there is no need of including trouble in our national philosophy. It is unnecessary to point out the fallacies in such thinking—nor the sad deviation from the spirit of the men who pioneered in this country, who expected difficulties, hardships, deprivations, and plowed their way through them. The modern assumption is that the normal state of things means ease and smoothness. The assumption is making us soft, making us unwilling to cope with trouble, instead of taking trouble and constant adjustment as part of the day's work. Life has been made too easy for us as a nation—for us as individuals. We are all too ready to lie down if things do not go our way and blame it on the times. We are the strongest nation in the world and in imminent danger of a lazy and fun-loving philosophy making us the most corrupt. Sturdiness in the face of difficulty and even of defeat, unwillingness to lie down on the job—those are the things we need to cultivate and in the face of such qualities the bogies of social unrest and financial panics will lose their power to frighten us."

It was not new talk, but it was a determined angle

and he looked very fine and ready for trouble as he spoke. Even his political opponents apparently were glad to wish him luck. He was appealing to the sense of fight which in all men is stronger than the tendency to complain, and they responded.

"Good stuff," said Dick.

"Old stuff, but it gets them because they've forgotten it in all the talk about the new stuff. There's a shoddy kind of fatalism settling down over too many people. If we're going to the dogs, let's go—let's have a good time while we're going. Let each one of us get all the pleasure we can out of things with the least work and above all let's have no sacrifices. It's shoddy—more so than the old type of greed when men piled up fortunes for the sake of excitement and spent their money in gorgeous ways. Fortunes now go for gasoline and head waiters and jazz."

Dick looked at him a bit oddly.

"Is this a national or a personal indictment?"

"National absolutely, except in so far as every individual contributes to the composite temper of the nation. And anyway it's not an indictment. It's an attempt at analysis. The condition may not be our fault at all and if it is our fault it's hard to find the initial sin. It's probably an inevitable condition. Blame it on the war if you like. Its shoulders are broad."

"They need to be. When are you getting off? Saturday or Monday?"

"Monday, if you'll come out into the woods with me over Saturday and Sunday. Otherwise Saturday."

"Where to?"

"Anywhere. I'd like to cool my brain before I go away and I'd like a couple of days with you. We could go to Lake Carmine and spend the night at my cabin."

"Sure, I'll go."

The still woods charmed them both. They drew off a thousand worries. The fishing was poor and the lake too cold for more than a quick swim, but there were the woods and the quiet and the long walks that were so peacefully reflective and talks about everything that mattered. Out in the midst of the forest it did not embarrass either of them to unload their deepest and most philosophic meditations. Yet it was not until the afternoon of the second day had waned that either of them mentioned Cecily. They were smoking on the little wharf which edged the lake watching the sun fall behind the hills.

"Cecily would like this," said Matthew quietly.

"Um——" said Dick.

"By the way, I went to see her the other night. I wanted to tell you that I did."

"She well?"

"Seems to be. Pretty lonely, I guess. I wish I could do something for you two."

"That's all right. We've closed that chapter, Mat."

"I suggested to Cecily that she open a new one with me. She declined very promptly and fittingly. I was too excited for a moment to see straight."

Dick, who had turned angrily at the first words, grinned suddenly.

"Well, you are a cool old duck. What was the idea? What was going to happen to Fliss and the Senatorial career?"

"Temporarily I forgot even Fliss, to say nothing of the latter factor. I'm awfully fond of Cecily, you know."

"So she turned you down, did she?"

"It's not funny to me, particularly. Amazing as it is, I was in earnest. What I bring the thing up for is to say simply that you can't get away with this separation stuff, Dick. Cecily is a young, beautiful woman and I'm

not going to be the only person to make that proposition to her. And she is a very lonely woman and her judgments may falter."

"You mean we should be divorced?"

"I don't suggest any solutions, Dick. I only want you to realize the situation to the fullest extent. And of course you realize that my rather caddish treatment of Fliss will not be repeated. Fliss gets me and everything I've got from now on, just as she always has. Fliss plays awfully fair, you know."

"Yes, that's what I like about her. Now Cecily can't see it. She used to like Fliss, but she turned completely—for no reason."

"Good reason. Fliss became Anti-Christ to Cecily's philosophy."

"Cecily's philosophy became very narrow in the past year."

"Narrow, but deep. If it ever broadens now she will be a wonderful person."

Dick smoked thoughtfully. "Queer how hard I am about that mess. I feel as if I'd been let in for something and then let down. I wanted to do my best for the family, but I had to have a little mental relaxation. I couldn't merge with Cecily absolutely and she wouldn't take anything else. She wouldn't expand at all. She's right in her point of view, of course, but that very rightness gradually killed all tenderness in me. It was so exclusive. It seemed to me sometimes as if I was shut up in a room which was too orderly for comfort."

He stopped from sheer embarrassment and added one sentence that meant more than all the rest.

"I got so I couldn't laugh naturally."

"Neither of you can laugh much just now. But you'll get over that."

"The hell of it is," said Dick, "in feeling that you've

married a girl and she's got a bunch of babies and then you can't put it across. I wrecked her chances of getting you for a husband for example, and now she's stranded."

"She's got the children."

"I know. I know."

"Well, don't get hard, old man, and you'll be able to see it through, I'm sure. Think straight on it if you can. I tell you, if you'd seen Cecily the other night mention your name——"

Dick sprang up. "Let's cut it out, Mat. There are some things I don't think about these days. If I did I'd run back to Cecily to-morrow. And I'm telling you that that wouldn't help. We'd have a wonderful time—for a little while—but after that it would be the same old story over again with the same old conclusion, if not a more tragic one."

They got their supper in the little cabin and drove back to town in the moonlight, each drawing into his own thoughts. At Matthew's house Fliss hailed them with delight, but Dick stopped only for a few minutes and then went back to the club.

There were a few men in the lounge, hidden behind papers; a few men in the card-room, which was blue with smoke and close and distasteful after the open air of the country. He found his room gloomy and himself restless. His loneliness was turning to bitterness to-night. Changing his rough clothes for others he went out again.

Dick had lived in Carrington too long not to know where every sort of person sought his diversions. In twenty minutes he had found the group whose usual form of amusement he felt might fill the night for him. They were gathered, as he had guessed they would be, in the room of one of the men, with plenty of liquor and

plenty of cards and a welcome for him. It was some years since he had joined this crowd, but once in it he felt natural enough, and the depression which had been bothering him was gone before long.

CHAPTER XXV

WINTER came early that year. Even in November the cold was steady and relentless. Cecily felt her isolation more as she was shut up with her children in the house, except for their periods of exercise. She dreaded the winter, especially the approach of Christmas, and the long winter evenings, which seemed so endless after the children were abed, dragged wearily—reading and reading, learning things, thinking things which her limited activities gave her no chance to put into practice. She had passed the point where she was in agony about her own troubles. Every book, every newspaper told her of tragedies much worse. And resolutely she tried not to think of Dick, although the news of him filtered through to her now and then. Some one had sent her a marked newspaper, the kind of paper to which she had no ordinary access, reeking with gossip and scandal. She did not want to read it, but of course she did, and in the smirking, veiled allusions, all nameless, she gathered that her story had filtered through to the public. She heard through Della that Dick was “going a pace.” She knew from the daily papers that he must be having trouble in the mining country. The winter had come early there, too, and the price of food and fuel had soared, fanning into a flame of irritation the discontents which were always smoldering. There were petty strikes already, with the threat of a big one hanging fire all the time. Cecily wondered how Dick was going to tackle all these problems with Matthew

away, especially if he were not living well. It surprised her to find that the personal rancor at the intimations of Dick's wildness did not arise. What she felt was rather this vague uninformed worry about his ability to handle these big affairs if he were in bad shape. She knew that he and Matthew were rich themselves, but that they had no great standing in comparison with the great financiers of the country who had tied up enormous sums of money in these mining ranges. Her stepfather told her that Dick had his hands full. She hated to ask further, telling herself that she had deliberately made it none of her business. But she searched the papers for news, none the less.

Allenby, the little town named for Matthew, where Dorothea had been born, seemed to be one source of trouble. She wondered sometimes if Dick went there often and if, when he passed Mrs. Olson's gaunt little house, he remembered the time she had spent there. That reminded her of Fliss again.

Her father and Della had asked her to spend Christmas with them, but she could not make up her mind to do that. The children were to have a Christmas with the kind of spirit she wanted, even if it would revive all sorts of painful memories for her. She had decided that and Della had shrugged her pretty shoulders and regretted and said that she and Walter would be sorry, for Gerald was going to a house party and wouldn't be home and that they wouldn't bother with a tree if Cecily wasn't coming and that she thought that she would give Walter a bathrobe and that she thought further that Walter was going to get her a platinum wrist watch, which she knew he couldn't afford but which she wanted "awfully." Cecily thought he probably would. Little use as she had for Della's methods she was reluctantly and truthfully admitting that Della had a way of keeping Walter happy.

It reminded her of Fliss's way with Matthew. Both of them put their husbands in the foreground, flattered them, coaxed them, played with them. And as Matthew had been amused and relaxed by such treatment, Walter was amused and impassioned. He quarreled with Della. That Cecily knew. But they could quarrel one hour and be absolutely and publicly enamored of each other during the next. The catastrophe of Walter's marriage had somehow not come to pass. And the bitterest drop in Cecily's cup was that she, who held marriage in deeper respect than either Della or Fliss, had been the only one of the three whose husband was left desolate and alone. Walter was working hard to make money for his Della. In spite of late hours and concentrated excitement he was making good in his father's business. While Fliss was in Washington sending back or having sent back little items to adorn the social pages of Carrington's newspapers already. "Senator and Mrs. Allenby were in attendance at" this and that function. Odd how Cecily could miss none of those little items, no matter how she tried to ignore them.

On the first of December after looking over a horde of frightening bills, Cecily went to see her stepfather at his office. She chose the office as affording a chance for a less intimate meeting than one at her house. The array of clerks and stenographers and glazed doors made her feel very impersonal and keyed her up until she found herself confronting her stepfather over a glass-topped table and looked straight into his grave keen eyes.

"What is it, Cecily? Do you need some money?"

"I can't get along on what I have. That house won't run on two hundred and fifty dollars a month."

"Of course you can't. I could have told you that. Do you know how much it costs to run mine? Well, I

won't tell you. I'll place a check to your credit to-day, my dear. And it will make me very happy."

"That wasn't what I came about, but it's what I knew you'd suggest," she said, smiling at him. "I want to mortgage my house."

"Why? Mortgage? You'll do nothing of the sort."

"Well, I could sell it, but I'd like to live there during the winter, you see. Then I could sell it later. I thought of a mortgage in bed last night. I don't quite know how to do it, but I'm sure that would be a way out. You'll help me, won't you?"

The old man got up and walked about the office angrily.

"You're making me very angry, Cecily. Very angry."

"I don't mean to. I don't want to. But I've got to do this the fair way. I can't take money under these circumstances."

"You're obsessed," said Mr. Warner. "Now, look here, Cecily, I'm your father, you know."

"I know you are—and you're more than most fathers ever could be, and so you must see that——"

"I've a right to support my own grandchildren."

"If they were in need," said Cecily, slowly, "it would be different. But they aren't. They could live on my money easily if we had a flat or a little house. I'd sooner have a little house than a flat. But to keep that big house running on your money—I can't do it. Don't you see that the children are my job—all I have left! I want them to be mine, and I can't feel that they are unless I do it."

Mr. Warner looked at her with his brows knit.

"How much is the house worth? Fifty thousand?"

"Forty-five, wasn't it?"

"I'll see about your mortgage, Cecily, but you must promise not to sell it or do anything further without consulting me."

She thanked him and promised and left the office, conscious as she was nowadays that a buzz of comment and gossip followed her. Mr. Warner, watching from the window, saw that she was not driving a car, saw her cross the street on foot.

"Steel underneath," he said aloud.

At noon he met Dick at the club and called him. "Do you know Cecily is mortgaging her house?"

"Hell! And I deposited money to her credit last month."

"She won't touch it, Dick."

"One of those ridiculous notions. The money isn't important. I argued about that, Mr. Warner. I did my level best. It makes me feel a fool, you know."

"You haven't argued any more than I have. But I guess she's got an idea back of it all. She wants to feel that it's she who looks after the kids."

A dull flush crept up into Dick's cheeks.

"She looks after them, anyway, no matter whether I pay a bill here and there or not, doesn't she? And it puts me in a rotten position."

Mr. Warner laid a comradely arm over Dick's shoulders.

"You are in a rotten position," he agreed, "and you got yourself into it—wanting to have everything in the world. Cecily is worth sacrificing some things for, my boy."

"It wasn't that I wasn't willing to give up anything," Dick shrugged away. "What's the use of going over it? The thing's threadbare."

"How are things with you now, Dick?"

"Hell to pay on the ranges. Matthew wants me to spend part of the winter there and I think I may. It was well enough to keep your hand on from here in the old days, but things are different now. It's going to take

brains to handle that yapping crowd of Slovaks up there."

"How can you handle it on the ground?"

"Watch things. Let them know you're there. Be a bit more friendly. They like the idea of the city men being on the ground, you know. And I could keep an eye on some of these raw superintendents. There's a good deal of mishandling, you know."

"Well, I'm telling you, Dick, that if things get any worse we'll have a time handling every one."

Dick nodded and went away. He was in a nasty temper. He was becoming increasingly resourceless out of actual working hours. While he was at work he was all right. It was after six o'clock that things wore out. He plowed through diversions too quickly, try as he might to make them last. The crowd he had been "traveling with," he told himself, were becoming very tiresome. He knew exactly when they would do everything they did—at what stage of the evening each one of them would change his temper or his way of talking, and it was all boring. He drifted into cafés, but the acquaintances whom he met there all knew about him and Cecily, and though plenty of groups tried to attach him, and would gladly have done so, he had an irritated sense of the comments about him that kept him from wanting to draw down the fire of more of them.

It irritated him, too, to know that his gayety was becoming more and more perfunctory and that he was not getting fun out of things which should have been fun. Several deliberate efforts to amuse himself had failed completely, ending with reaction and disgust. He had tried, in company with some men who were used to that sort of thing, to pick up some girls at a public dance hall—and long before the expected end of the evening, found himself so let down and bored that he left the crowd,

with the flimsiest excuse. He had tried a bit of joyriding, but the seductions of that experience with the almost professional joyriding girl who knew just how to curve into the arm of the man at the wheel of the car had left him not only cold, but amused in a kind of sarcastic, unsmiling way. There were times when he felt that he had lost his youth and his power to be amused—his ability to enjoy things. Cecily had taken the verve out of the very things which had been contested points and for the right to enjoy which he had so stubbornly contended.

Also Christmas was approaching and the nervous effort to banish all thought of the holiday from his mind was wearing. With problems all day and little relaxation anywhere, Dick was beginning to show baggy pouches under his eyes and little lines trailed down from the corners of his mouth. In his office that afternoon he was so exacting that his exasperated stenographer, escaping finally from his criticism, told her friend in the next office that she "didn't wonder Mr. Harrison's wife wouldn't live with him. He's got a terrible temper—fierce."

Poor Dick, when the office was empty and he had to leave it, strolling back to the club to a choice of chicken casserole or English muttonchop, without enthusiasm, trying not to notice that the shop windows were hung with tinsel and gaudy with that gaudiness which is so beautiful at Christmas time, swinging past the toyshops with carelessness, and then turning back to look into the window of one of them.

Then came the day before the holiday with one of those fine pictorial snowstorms to make it all the more festive, with the unavoidable truce with work and struggle which pervaded even the world of business, with the greeting on every one's lips. It seemed to Dick that

he could not turn around without stirring up some memory of his home. He could see it so clearly, decorated for Christmas with a green English holly wreath below the brass knocker on the white door, poinsettias in the hall, the tree in its corner of the long living-room and the fire blazing; Dorothea's little mind aflame like her cheeks with excitement; Leslie walking stumblingly among his presents; the baby walking now, too, probably. He would catch himself wondering what new words Leslie had learned. He wondered if Cecily would have a Christmas celebration this year. Yes, she would. It was like her to uphold things for the children even if her own fun were shattered. But she must be short of money. At that thought the glimmer of tenderness in his heart went out. It was bad enough not to see the children, but not to be allowed to support them! To be treated as a criminal outcast! Well, he'd left of his own free will, he reminded himself, and went on to the embittering thought that he'd tried to solve things without a break. They couldn't have gone on—silent evenings, the constant sense that he wasn't pleasing his wife, that she felt he was deteriorating, the slight that her rigorous standards, single track virtues put upon him. He wasn't happy; she wasn't happy. It couldn't go on. Matthew had said it couldn't go on as it was. Probably not. Probably end in a divorce. That would be a nasty business; no worse than lots of other people went through, but Cecily would hate it. Poor Cecily! And in its endless track his mind pondered again whose was the fault and where the remedy.

He had a stupid supper at the almost deserted club, fancying sensitively that the few men sitting at nearby tables were pitying him. Then, following instinct rather than intention as he started out for his usual walk, he found himself headed in the direction of his former

home. It was several miles, but he walked them quickly. In the familiar street which he had avoided since he had left Cecily, he felt a desire to escape notice. But he would not yield to that and kept his head up as he went along the side of the street opposite his own house.

There were lights in the house. That made him feel a little queer. He'd known of course that the place was inhabited, that life was going on there as usual, but the sight of the lights made it so much more real. The wrought iron porch lanterns brought out the holly on the door. It was not a wreath this year. A sprig of green tied to the knocker.

With the strangest clandestine feeling, Dick crossed the street and stood beside the gate. Three months and more since he had opened that high iron gate whose beautiful workmanship had made him so proud. He opened it now softly and went up the side of the brick walk, in the shadow cast by the great fir trees. There, under the living-room windows, he saw them all—Ellen holding the baby, Dorothea and Leslie on the floor beside the tree and Cecily in the corner of the big couch. As he saw, he knew what he had been hoping. There was no one else there.

The children had grown so unbelievably in three months!

Cecily heard the door open. She and Ellen turned their heads simultaneously, and then at a swift movement of Cecily's, Ellen sat still and let Cecily go through the hall.

"Dropped in to see the tree," said Dick, trying to be jocular.

Then he held out his arms and Cecily crept into them, both of them too glad for the blessed relief which had come to their starved emotions to question the right or safety of such an end to their separation. It was such

sheer joy to be together again, to see each other, to deliberately forget all issues in the hour of delight. Dick had not let himself think of his hunger for the children. But to hold them now, play the old games with them, hear them laugh, try their toys——

"I wasn't sure you'd let me in," he said apologetically, "or I'd have brought some presents for all of you."

The tears in her eyes and the joy of her smile were consolation for that.

Because the children were so small and ready to accept all events and because Ellen's eyes never pried, it was very easy for them. After a while the children had to go to bed and Dick and Cecily took them up together in a riot of fun. It was all as it had been, thought Dick. He drew the familiar blue blanket up over Leslie, who was too tired to struggle and resent being put to bed. And Dorothea put her arms around his neck in that same baby way.

When they went down again they found that Ellen had spread a cloth on a little table before the fire and left supper there for them. She went out. They heard the back door close and her firm heavy footsteps crunch through the snow. And embarrassment settled over the man and the woman sitting in such apparent comfort there. They were paying already for that leap to emotional conclusions. Each of them asking fearfully what all this meant and what was passing in the mind of the other, each trying to avoid subjects which might hurt the other and conscious of the multitude of dangerous subjects. The supper gave them something more to do, but that, too, came to an end and Dick carried the little table out through the dining-room to the kitchen. Cecily tried to busy herself with something, unsettling things that she might settle them again. It was horrible, she told herself, that she should be so afraid of Dick's pres-

ence. Why did he have that air of half-apology, of intrusion?

He did not help her when he came back, but stood, looking curiously about the room.

"Same place," said Cecily, trying pathetically to be light.

"Did you mind my coming?"

"It was a dreadful evening until you came," she answered.

They were conscious that several hours lay before them. It was only half-past eight o'clock. And on both of them, afraid to begin to talk, hung those two hours for which they were so hungry and yet which were so oppressive. They sat down beside each other on the long davenport and talked of the children—*anecdote after anecdote*—but stories of them led to plans, and as plans began to be suggested in their minds they became wary again. Dick drew his wife's head down against him finally, and for a long time they rested so. Odd, that the mere contact could give them such security. Farther and farther drifted their thoughts from discussion and analysis; back to memories of each other.

In the morning, while they were at breakfast with the children, the telephone rang.

"It's father," said Cecily, returning from answering it, "wanting to wish me a Merry Christmas. He was so upset because he couldn't get here for the tree last night. He's coming to get us for dinner. We're dining with him. Della and Walter are going out. Will you come too, Dick?" The last a little hesitantly for, after all, Dick had not declared his plans.

"Did you tell him I was here?" countered Dick.

She flushed. "I didn't like to tell over the telephone."

Dick looked at her gravely. She realized as his eyes met hers that he looked older—and harder.

"I'll tell grandfather for a surprise," said Dorothea complacently.

They both winced. "We must talk things over this morning."

"But it's Christmas day," protested Cecily.

He frowned that old familiar frown, the frown that always came when she had sought to lay down a rule as to when he should or should not do a thing.

"Better right away."

In answer she rang for Ellen and asked her to take the children out.

"Take them for a walk before their naps, will you, since we'll be out for dinner."

Ellen nodded and hurried them out, all smiles. It was a true holiday for Ellen, appealing to all her romantic sense. The quarrel was over; the husband had come home.

They did not seek to leave the room. Dick wandered to the window and looked out at the children stumbling down the snowy path. Then he turned to Cecily, sitting so slim and erect in her breakfast place.

"I suppose it was silly to come back," he blundered.

"Silly?"

There she was, tripping him over a triviality again.

"Well, perhaps not silly, but unwise."

"Why? Didn't you want to?"

"You know I wanted to. But we've settled nothing, dear."

"Why did you come?" asked Cecily.

"I suppose I was called by the holiday," answered Dick with simple truthfulness. "I came instinctively. I—couldn't help it."

"But you feel just the same?"

"The same as what?"

"As you did when you went."

Dick seemed to search his memory. "Well, it never was very clear to me just what the issue was. If you mean that I feel terribly in the wrong now, terribly culpable for all those misunderstandings which broke us up, I don't believe I do feel that. I still don't know quite where I was wrong. I was stupid about things, little things, of course."

"But, Dick, don't you feel that—that this life is the best? With me, with the children? Don't you see that the things I wanted to avoid had to be avoided?"

He scrutinized the dogmatism of her face carefully, painfully. It was such an exalted face. It seemed such a pity that he couldn't put it at rest. All she wants, he thought, is a whale of an apology for sins I may not be conscious of, but which I may have committed.

"Can't we be happy together—as we were last night—after this?"

He felt now that she was trying to pledge him. The fury of her ideals was pursuing him again.

"Do you mean spend every night sitting on the davenport together?" He meant to lighten it, but as usual he failed. Her face showed her shrinking.

"Don't mock," she said.

Dick took a restless turn or two around the room and came back to stand over his wife.

"Cecily, I was a fool to disturb you last night. I was worse. I was a robber. I robbed you of the peace that was beginning to come to you. I shan't ask you to forgive me. It was because I couldn't help it. But I won't repeat it. I'll not bother you again."

"Are you going away again?"

"It's better, I think. We aren't closer—aren't easy together—aren't really happy. Isn't it better that I go?"

There was pleading in his voice, but she was too hurt to hear it; pain, but she was deaf to that, too.

She could only see that he could go; that his going was an insult to her desire that he should stay.

She got up, clutching the edge of the table.

"Then, go—go quickly!"

Dick put his hands to his head. They'd done it again. Again. Well, this time she meant it. But to go without a caress—— He went towards her.

"Can't I kiss you once before I go?"

And because she yearned for it, she taunted him.

"Your kisses aren't love," she said bitterly. "They're desire!"

Ellen, returning with the children from the walk, found that Cecily was shut in with the baby. When she finally came from her room she was dressed to go out.

"Mr. Warner will be here any moment," she said. "I'll dress Dorothea. Put that white dress with the yellow embroidery on Leslie. Don't forget to lock up the house when you go out, will you? And Ellen, don't say anything to any one about Mr. Harrison's having been here. He won't be here again."

"Oh, I'm sorry," said Ellen irrepressibly.

Dorothea, hearing her mother's sentence, had set up a howl, and Leslie joined her for company.

"My father is gone again," wailed Dorothea with spirit, making comedy out of tragedy, until Ellen, contrary to all discipline, presented her with an irrelevant chocolate cream which distracted her temporarily.

Ellen did not say anything more, but she kept her eyes on Cecily's drooping figure and Cecily smiled at her rather pathetically.

"I suppose it's all my fault, Ellen. Something's gone wrong with the world and I'm tangled up in the machinery."

Ellen never spoke in metaphors.

"It's not what should be with a loving couple like you and Mr. Harrison."

There came to Mr. Warner's house a few hours later an A. D. T. messenger, weighted with an immense box of flowers. In the depths of the layers of roses, so fragrant and cool, was Dick's note. "Cecily dear, I had no right to come, no right surely when I had come, to hurt you so. Please try to forget it and me; and if you can't quite do that think of me as having a heart full of gratitude and respect and affection which expresses itself badly, but as best it can. To-morrow I want to send the children some Christmas things. Please let me do that, and if there's any way I can help you—anything you will let me do for you—it will make me happy. Merry Christmas! Dick."

He wrote that, after many drafts of its wording, sitting in his room at the club, and he hunted all over the city for flowers, finding some at length in a hotel flower-shop. If Cecily could have seen him as he wrote, his big hand thoughtfully penning the words, his face drawn and set, she would have known that it was not she alone who was humiliated and outraged by the turn of things. When he had sent the flowers he wrote other letters, one of them to Matthew, telling him that he contemplated going at once into the mining towns.

"It's necessary, gentlemen," he told a certain group of men a few days later as he outlined his plans. "We've put roughnecks up there in charge; we've let the social workers in and paid their salaries; we've put young fellows out of college up there, and none of it has worked. There's more trouble all the time. The only thing we haven't tried is for one of us who really is responsible to go up himself. At the present moment I

can see my way to spending some time there. I won't bring about a reformation, you know. I don't promise to stop all the strikes, or to clean out the I. W. W. But I can promise you accurate information after a few months as to what all the trouble is about, and if anything can be done about the situation other than let it go to pot and save what we can of our money. How about it?"

They listened to him with interest—all these men who had money and all the things dependent on money at stake; seeming not too serious, as is the usual way of men of big affairs, showing no great enthusiasm, no excitement.

They liked Dick because he was, compared to most of them, so young and yet so sane and so successful, and they knew he'd "had trouble" with his wife, L. A. Warner's stepdaughter, and they were sorry for that because, though the age of romance was past for them and the word love had lost its magnetism, they knew that a domestic upset was a serious thing for a young man. "Might send him to the dogs," they would have said.

"The point is that with the 'Senator' away (that was their jovial term for Matthew), we can't really spare our other young man, can we? When Allenby went he assured us he was turning everything over to you to handle, and that you'd look out for us," said old Mr. Cox, tilting his chair back and looking at Dick astutely.

"The more I look at the work there is to be done, the more I see that the machinery of distribution, which is here, is in such good shape that any one of three fellows in the office, whom I could mention, could look out for it. The big problem is the problem of production, and that needs to be investigated from the ground up—not on the basis of what things were ten years ago, or five years ago, or one year ago—but as they are now."

"Let him do it," said A. C. Miller, who spoke briefly.

"Some I. W. W.'ll put a bomb under him, and we can't spare him."

"Gentlemen," said the chairman, with the ponderosity which had given him his position on so many boards, "may we have a motion?"

They were given a motion and Dick had his way. He heard the chairs scrape back, saw the discussion break up into fragments, saw the men go out, with their friendly, terse nods to each other and a wave of energy swept over him. Mare's nest, chimera, windmills—whatever it was that he was going to find or to tilt with, at least he had a job that was fresh and that would take him out of town.

He scribbled on a telegraph blank, "Put it over all right," and addressed it to Senator Matthew Allenby.

In his delight he wanted to do something for somebody, and his thoughts turned to Cecily.

He sought a florist's again.

"Every morning," he said, to the dapper young clerk who waited on him, "every morning I want you to make a selection of the flowers which you have which are suitable—suitable for the middle of a table, centerpiece, you know. Ever have an order like that?"

"Yes, sir," said the omniscient clerk. "Several ladies have left standing orders for their tables."

"Good line, that last. Well, you do as you do to them. This address for the flowers; that for the bills."

"Any length of time, sir?"

"Oh, yes," said Dick. "Always. As long as we both (you and I, my friend) shall live. Always. Why not? Sure."

"Kind of a nut," said the clerk, gratefully regarding the departing figure of the man who had given him the biggest order he'd ever booked. "Sweet on her now,

you know. But he'll get sick of that. Wait till he gets a bill or two."

Dick went out and jumped into the roadster which stood by the curb, and started for the garage. He wouldn't sell the car, but he would put it up. He couldn't take it up to the range and play the game he wanted to play.

He skirted the main streets, for the traffic was heavy during this late afternoon hour. Just off one of the big commercial streets he turned down an avenue always of doubtful repute, even in these days of supposedly high city morals—a street of ramshackle buildings which were supposed to be apartments, but behind whose dingy lace curtains quack doctors and dentists had their lucrative offices, spiritualists held cheap séances and other money-making transients had their headquarters. Just in front of his car, held up by a confusion of trucks in front of it, Dick saw a singularly well-dressed woman whom he looked at with interest and then amazement as he recognized her. It was Della. No doubt of it. They had all criticized that short white fur coat when she bought it. She was going along slowly, close in to the walls which bordered the sidewalk, looking for something in some window. It struck Dick that she wanted to avoid detection. Then he turned to put on his brakes and when he looked up again she had gone—through one of those dingy wood framed doorways. Dick pulled up his car and waited farther down the street. It was growing darker now and he was worried. No place for a girl to be alone. What could she be up to? After half an hour he saw her again, the white fur coat starting out of the dusky street. He followed her with the car and hailed her when she was four or five blocks away from the place she had stopped.

"Hey, Della. Can I bring you home?"

She got in with an attempt at her usual hilarity, which struck him as very forced. He maneuvered until they stopped under an arc light and then shot a swift glance at her face. She had been crying, all right. Crying her eyes out.

"Where have you been all afternoon?" he asked her casually.

"Just shopping. I was late for dinner. Awfully nice of you to pick me up, Dick."

So she didn't mean to be communicative. Dick dropped her at her door and went on, pondering. Well, it might have been some obscure relative, some crazy notion to see a fortune-teller who told her she was going to die young. It wasn't any love affair, anyhow. Not from the look of those eyes. She looked as if she'd been beaten. Dick decided to dismiss it from his mind. It wasn't his business, after all.

CHAPTER XXVI

IT was two days after the New Year had come in. Only nine o'clock, but Cecily had almost decided to go to bed. The timidity which she had felt often at first in being in a house alone at night had almost gone now, and she was locking the doors and windows and turning off lights with mechanical routine. The house was full of the fragrance of hothouse flowers. Dick's generosity had not taken into account the fact that flowers last more than a day and his "middle of the table" bouquet had overflowed into the other rooms. Cecily looked at them, wondering how long he planned to keep this up. She knew from the accounts in the paper that he had left town, for the papers had got wind of the new plan, and, to Dick's rage, played it up in one or two issues before they were suppressed.

The flowers pleased Cecily. For once she had hardly thought of whether they were consistent with the separation between her and her husband or not. It had been sheer delight to have flowers. As she went down to put some little yellow pink rose deeper in water she heard an unfamiliar sound and straightened up suddenly. There was surely some one at the side door fumbling with the door-knob. She looked at the clock; quarter past nine only. It couldn't be a burglar. Somebody drunk, perhaps. Pushing open the door to the pantry, she whistled softly and the big Airedale came rushing in. With him jumping beside her, she went towards the door.

This time the person, whoever it was, decided to ring. Cecily turned on all the lights and opened the door, prepared to threaten or command. But at sight of her visitor she stepped back in amazement, a restraining hand on the leaping dog.

"Why, Della! where did you drop from?"

Della, swathed in white fur, slipped inside the storm door and closed the inner one before she answered.

"I just came over," she said, a little breathlessly. "I wanted to see you—you know, to talk to you."

"I thought you were a burglar," laughed Cecily. "I was going to let Bill fly at your throat. Why did you try the side door and where is Walter?"

"Walter——" Della was standing in the light now and Cecily could see that her little pink face so made for powder and smiles was streaked with tears and still distorted with some violent emotion. "Walter's home, I guess. He doesn't know I came here. I thought he wouldn't know, so that's why I came to you. He thinks I'm afraid of you and wouldn't dare to come. But I showed him I did come here and he doesn't know where I am and——"

"Hush," said Cecily, "you're hysterical, Della. Have you been walking in the snow in those slippers? She looked down at the slim black satin slippers from which caked snow was already melting. "Come upstairs to my room and get dry. Then," she rode over an immense impulse to refuse sanctuary to Della, "then you can tell me all about it."

Della followed her. But she could not be silent.

"I came to you, Cecily, and I know you don't like me very well, and I don't know as I blame you, because you and I aren't like each other at all, and I've always been scared to death of you, but what could I do, for I couldn't go to any of the girls because they don't know anything

about things like this—at least, I hope they don't, although perhaps the married ones have troubles of their own. It isn't as if I were older and I thought, of course, Walter would be nice and sympathetic and he wasn't at all, but he was so stern and cross and scolding—and I can't be scolded and I won't have it."

She ran on, plunging through incoherent phrases and sentences, with the tears running down her foolish little cheeks. Cecily looked at her in amazement.

"Hush," she said again, "you'll make yourself ill. What is it, Della? Have you had a quarrel with Walter? Is that it?"

"That's only a little bit of it," sobbed Della, as the cause of her trouble rose again to bring her horror, "only a little of it. Although I thought he'd be nice to me! I thought he'd be nice to me; a girl gives up a lot when she marries a man, and it's pretty hard to have him turn against her."

Cecily had her upstairs now, sitting on her chaise longue, and she was forcing quilted slippers upon her.

"If you really want to tell me, Della, you must stop being hysterical and begin at the beginning. And you mustn't be quite so noisy or you'll wake the babies in the nursery."

Della shuddered from head to foot.

"That's it!" she cried, her eyes distended. "Babies! Cecily, Cecily, they say I'm going to have a baby and I won't, I won't! And Walter is so cruel about it."

Cecily was no longer naïve about such things. She had heard many conversations which had told her unwilling ear much about involuntary motherhood. But never had she seen such horror as was Della's. Mixed with her recoil from the violence and the ugly mood of the girl was a queer feeling of responsibility that was almost pride. Della had come to her.

"You're going to have a baby, Della? Why, you silly girl, that's the nicest thing that could happen to you. I'm awfully glad."

"Don't! I thought you'd help me! I know it's all right for you to have children, Cecily—you're the domestic type—but I'm not. I won't, I won't, I tell you! I won't lose my figure and have to give up dancing and get old and ugly and repulsive and listen to babies all the night and die!"

Cecily sat down beside her and took hold of one clenched little hand. "Tell me all about it, Della," she said quietly. "When did you find out all this?"

"Last week."

"Did you see Dr. Norton?"

"Not him. He was horrid to me once. I wouldn't go to see him."

"But how do you know?"

"I saw another doctor." She had stopped crying. "I hunted one out on Eighth Street where no one would know me or begin to talk about it or tell anybody."

"Eighth Street! Why, Della, that's no street for decent doctors!"

"Lots of doctors advertise in the windows along there," said Della sullenly. "Anyway, I wasn't going to Dr. Norton."

"And this other doctor told you what?"

Della shuddered convulsively. "He was horrible—horrible. Such an awful place with dreadful looking women around in the waiting room. And a man tried to flirt with me and the doctor patted me on the arm and told me that he could tell me more about it and that he'd have to see a hundred dollars first. And I didn't know what to do, Cecily, so I hurried out of there and it's lucky I wasn't murdered or didn't have my gold purse stolen."

"What happened then?"

"I've been worrying till I was almost dead. Walter knew I wasn't myself—my skin was all dead looking! Look at me, Cecily. I'm a perfect fright! So to-night he found me crying and he asked me what the matter was, and I told him, and he was glad, he said. Glad! Glad that I was going to die!"

"Nonsense, Della. Why shouldn't he be glad?"

"He said he thought it would mature me and that we'd both be happier and that he'd try to make it easy—as if it could be easy! I'd die; I'm the type that always dies, leaving a baby, and the man marries again. And I told Walter he'd marry again; no, I told him I wouldn't have it, I wouldn't, and I won't!"

"But there's nothing to do about it."

"There must be things. There must be. Walter said that same thing—nothing to do. But I'll kill myself! I'll show you all! I'll show him!"

For a few minutes Cecily let her storm. She was collecting her thoughts. The mad ignorance, the uncontrolled violence of this girl in the face of one responsibility horrified her. And astonished her, too. She had not dreamed Della was so ignorant.

"But, Della, dear," she found herself pleading, "you must have known that was one of the things that happen to people when they marry—babies."

Della shrugged her shoulders in angry impatience.

"Don't be silly, Cecily. You know lots of girls don't have them and don't ever intend to have them. Once in a while a girl makes a mistake."

At her full height Cecily looked down on Della in disgust. The things she was instinctively fighting against, for which she had endured so much, all seemed epitomized in this hysteric figure of inconsequence which was so helpless up against a fact of life—a fact demand-

ing personal sacrifice. "Incapable," she thought, feeling strong as never before. And then there came through her scorn that pride again that Della had come to her, and a real anxiety for Della and the child which might be hers.

"If this is true," she said, "you know you ought not to be letting yourself get wrought up. It's bad for you and bad for the baby," she finished tactlessly.

A shiver went over the crouching girl.

"Don't! Don't!" she moaned. "I won't have it, I tell you. I wish I'd never seen Walter. He's let me in for this now, just as he let me in for marrying him after that mess at college. I wish I never had married him in spite of all their silly talk. Anybody could have known I wasn't a tough girl. I didn't stay out all night because I wanted to. I couldn't help it if the silly car froze up and we had to go to the nearest place to keep from freezing ourselves. But he was so fussy that he got me all worked up, too, and I married him. And now, after all I've done for him, he was so cruel to-night. He didn't care about my feelings. He just wanted the horrible——"

"Hush, Della."

"I thought you'd help me. You've been married a long while. You——"

"Della, if you mean what I suppose you mean by 'helping' you, I wouldn't have the faintest idea of how to help you in that way. And of course I wouldn't anyway. It's not only wicked to consider such a thing; it's the worst kind of wickedness. It's dreadful, awful, criminal."

Her words seemed to dry Della's tears. She got up, wrapping her coat around her.

"Well, I can kill myself," she said, her blurred blue eyes full of childish drama. There was something in

this pure childishness that went home to Cecily's heart. There were only three or four years between her age and Della's, but she felt decades older and wiser. It came to her suddenly that this was no figure of evil before her. It was just a frightened little girl, uttering angry threats in the face of her fear—ignorant of all things that might stand her in stead in a crisis, equipped only to meet gayety and enjoyment. Cecily had the heavier equipment and she longed to lend it, to bolster up this frail little soul. She took her by both shoulders.

"You won't do any such ridiculous thing. Sit down and let me tell you a few things. Let me tell you," she went on to Della, reluctant beside her, "what a joy it is, what wonderful happiness it really is, in spite of all the pain and trouble, to have a baby of your own, something living that you really created and made strong. Why, it's most beautiful."

But Della's face was hard and drawn and sullen.

"That's if you like that sort of thing. I don't, that's all. I'm not the type," she repeated.

The motion picture phrase struck Cecily as true. Della wasn't the "type" to understand what she was talking about. Della had been told that she was the type to wear electric blue, to carry off a Marcel, to dance the toddle. And it was true. She hadn't got a word of what Cecily said, and she wouldn't. To her little mind there was no entrance for the abstract or the philosophical. It must all be pictorial.

Cecily felt failure, and as she felt she wasn't gaining her point, she cast about for new weapons. She was on the offensive with her philosophy this time, and she realized that the old weapons of defense were useless. She could not make Della see these things by talking to her. But there must be a way; she must find it.

"You and Walter can talk about how low I am when

you see him. He feels like you do," said Della bitterly.

"Walter thinks you're wonderful," answered Cecily. "He's crazy about you."

Della began to cry again. "Then why is he so cruel? Why does he want me to go through such an awful thing?"

"He doesn't mean to be cruel. Of course he doesn't realize what it means to a woman."

That was the right note. A hint of martyrdom.

"I should say not."

"And men are always pleased at news like that. I tell you, Della" (Cecily was striking her stride now), "men are never as crazy about a woman as when she is expecting her first baby. You see, they feel so grateful and so miserable."

"I should think they would," moaned Della.

"Of course you can't see it as I do, but really the nicest time of my married life was before Dorothea came." She faltered a little at that, for it was hard to use those memories for Della's sake, but she realized that Della was listening finally.

"Dick couldn't do enough for me."

"Didn't you die—staying in for months?"

"But you don't, my dear—that's awfully old-fashioned. That belonged to the days (here was an inspiration) when they didn't have the modern point of view. And you can get the loveliest dresses. You'd be like a picture, Della."

It was clear that at last Della was getting a Madonna vision of herself. She had stopped crying except for an occasional dab at her eyes and with her eyes fixed on the other side of the room looked very young and pathetic.

"There's one thing," said Cecily. "It isn't all misery by any means. Everybody's so awfully interested in

you and so awfully nice to you; and you can do everything except maybe dive and dance—along towards the end—and then of course all the——”

“But the end when you die, maybe?”

“You don’t die. You have so much anesthetic you don’t know anything about it. Then you have a cunning little baby and you can have the loveliest baby things. Of course Walter wouldn’t want you to have any of the hard care of it.” Skillful Cecily, sliding over all the things that had made her children real to her; nights of watching and caring when a baby had a cough or a touch of croup, the routine of nursing, the fatigue and ill health which might be eased, but which could never be destroyed. She was fighting for Della’s baby now, and if Della saw it as a pink and white doll in a dotted Swiss cloud, with herself as an invalid in interesting negligees, still she was gaining her end. That it was a great step for Cecily—this relinquishing of her own fastidiousness in discussion, this generosity of method—she did not realize, yet.

Della was growing calmer. Her hysteria had half spent itself and Cecily had turned her mind away from horrors for the moment, anyway. It was probably the first time for many days that she had been able to see anything except blackness, and the relief showed in the relaxation of her body. Cecily ventured a little further. She was feeling a sudden warmth of affection for Della. The sense of her usefulness to some one outside her own group of children and the feeling that some one had turned to her for confidence and compassion was expanding all her starved emotions. She put her arm around Della.

“Poor little Della.”

“Isn’t life terrible?” asked Della mournfully.

“You want to stop worrying about everything,” an-

swered Cecily. "You want to just lie back and let us take care of you. We'll all see you through it and make it just as easy. Just let me talk to Walter and explain things and he won't upset you again."

"He was so cruel." Della relapsed again. "I didn't tell you everything. He said I was a coward and——"

"He was excited. You'd better spend the night here now, Della. I'm going to tuck you up and telephone to Walter where you are."

"Do you think he'll come over?"

"Of course—to make sure you are all right."

She got Della into bed finally, diverting her momentarily by pressing upon her her most elaborate nightgown and negligee. Della cast a fleeting, discouraged glance at herself in the glass and slid between the covers, too worn out to resist longer.

"Of course I shan't be able to sleep," she said, "so if Walter comes over, he might come up for just a moment."

Cecily nodded and turned the light low. Then, from the safe distance of the kitchen extension telephone, she telephoned Walter and half an hour later let him in.

"You say she's gone to bed?"

"Quite worn out. But she wanted to see you."

"Is she still hysterical?"

"No; she's calmer."

Walter's boyish face had grave lines of anxiety traced on it. He paced up and down the room for a minute, then turned to Cecily.

"Tell you what was the matter with her?"

"Yes."

He took a few more turns.

"Of course she's very young," he said, "but there doesn't seem any excuse for some of the things she said. She—I didn't think women—even girls—felt that way.

I know it's a sacrifice, but I thought every woman had instincts."

"Every woman has, but not always at this stage. Wait till the baby comes."

A funny, shaken smile came over Walter's face.

"I'd do anything in the world to make it easy. But of course if she's going to hate it so——"

"It's just her condition," Cecily told him. "Lots of women are hysterical. You're utterly in the wrong, Walter, when you argue with her. You want to soothe her, divert her. She's just a child and she hasn't had a bit of experience."

"She's older than you were."

"Della says I'm a different type, but I can remember Walter, times when the world frightened me to death. The only thing that helped was to feel that Dick was going along with me."

She stopped, and then went on again: "I don't believe you ought to try to make Della think of the serious things any more than she naturally will. Be awfully considerate, fussy; spoil her—she likes that. Make father spoil her, too. And remember, no matter how cross or queer she may be, that ignoring all that is part of the penalty you have to pay for having a baby of your own."

"Della's not your style," said Walter for the hundredth time, "but, really, if you would you could do a lot for her. She's light on the surface, but there's more to her than you'd think. Awfully sweet and generous. If we did have a baby and she had it to think about——"

"I know."

"Will you help us through, Cecily? I don't know much about such things, and mother's gone. Her own mother is rather dreadful. Boarding house! We haven't seen much of you lately, and that's been all my fault,

too. But now it might be—you'd be an angel to sort of stand by Della."

"Of course I will."

"Is Della in your room?"

"Yes. Come up."

At the door of the room with the dim light they paused and listened, but Della was not sobbing. They entered softly. She had turned on her side and fallen asleep like a peaceful child.

"I'd say good-night to her," said Cecily, and went downstairs again, closing the door after her. For a moment the warmth at her heart persisted and then loneliness, more devastating than ever, bitterness, jealousy of that husband and wife upstairs—together—swept her.

CHAPTER XXVII

THOSE first months in Washington took all the concentrated social skill of Fliss. They were months when she felt with confusion that she was playing a game with experts who could not be tricked. In the first place she was only twenty-five, and youth, except in a *débutante*, was an anomaly in the groups to which she sought ingress. The wives of the other Senators had fifteen to forty years more to their credit than had she. In Carrington her youth had been an asset. The older matrons petted her and the younger ones envied her. But this was different. The qualities which were at a premium here were not mere dash and chic style and dancing ability. It took brains to be singled out here.

Luckily she had plenty of money, and she had availed herself of every possible letter of introduction before she left Carrington. There were people in Carrington who knew the people whose names she had studied in the Washington papers and she had managed, not seeming too eager, to have a letter written here and one there, and to see that the letters were followed up. Her first two weeks had been spent in house-hunting, during which she had had occasion to bless Matthew a thousand times for his affluence and generosity. She found at last what she wanted in the proper part of town—a conventional, not too large city house, tenanted by a Senator's family last year. The Senator had gone to a club when his family went to Europe, and the house was available at an enormous rental. It had the advantage

of having been decorated the year before by the Senator's wife and done in admirable taste. Fliss sought an interior decorator, and with an uncanny shrewdness furnished it. There was enough of the solid to keep it from appearing faddish or nouveau; there was enough of the ugly to set off the beautiful. There was, last and most of all, quite enough of the beautiful to prove her taste.

The first weeks in Washington reminded Fliss somewhat grimly of her early encounters in Carrington. She went through the ordeal of the social column again—the ordeal of those who read about the functions to which they aspire and at which they were not attendant. Society columns are easy reading only for those who are quite indifferent to personal mention or omission, and they, of course, are the people who do not make a business of reading them. But Fliss had the comfort of never becoming despondent as she had in the old Carrington days. She had tools ready to her hand now and she meant to forge her way with them. More than that, she had found a work which was going to need all her wits and all her energies.

Matthew was busy constantly. He had been chosen for a good deal of routine committee work to break him in, and he had little time for Fliss and the observation of her labors. They went out together more than they had in Carrington, but it was to more formal affairs.

"Washington doesn't tend to make you chummy," she said, one night, leaning up against Matthew in the car as they were being whirled homeward after a rather colorless dinner.

"Finding it hard work?" he asked.

"I love it," she said lazily. "I love the sense of social intrigue. There's something to get your teeth into here. A lot to fight for. Out in Carrington, if you do get

to the top, what is there at the top except Mrs. Silverton's dinners? It's fun, I mean, but it stops. You can see the top. Here it's so much more tangled, but so much more interesting."

"You're doing it very well," answered Matthew. "You quite charmed Senator Gates to-night. How did you do it?"

"Listened to him. Isn't it queer how simple it is, as well as being so difficult? All I did was to flatter him a little—most of that by looking at him. But I had to be careful not to do it too much, because I mustn't get the reputation of being a Western vamp. It's just drawing that line."

"Clever girl!"

"I wish you were susceptible to flattery," she said irrelevantly, "and I'd tell you I thought you could give the bunch of them cards and spades."

He patted her hand and then, apparently feeling that insufficient, turned her face up to his and kissed her. She flushed a little at the casual caress, and then turned to look out of the window. The street lamps showed on her face that little wistful, half appealing expression which was making her piquancy so much more mysterious.

"Do you like it all, Matthew?"

"I'm interested, Fliss. I'm finding out about lots of things I wondered about. Some are true and some aren't. Of course, you mustn't expect me to do much for years. I'm pretty crude. I've got to learn."

"Crude! You should have heard the enlightened and important Senator Gates! He couldn't be much cruder."

"He has other assets. Don't expect too much, Fliss."

It was shortly after that that the Allenbys dined with Senator and Mrs. Gates, and from that dinner several important invitations fell the way of Fliss. It was, of

course, not only on her own account. There were many people who felt that it was very much worth while to cultivate young Senator Allenby, and tipped their wives off to that effect.

Fliss began her campaign in December shortly after the opening of the session. She was quite as busy weeding out undesirable invitations and discouraging worthless acquaintances as she was angling for the right ones. The thing that surprised her was to find out that the worthless acquaintances included among their number so many people of superficial distinction, but distinction, as she came to find out, that impressed no one except the people on the street. One couldn't go on the basis of clothes. The smart dressers too often didn't belong and some one whose suit might be last season's and whose hair was gray and worn without a Marcel might be a powerful or a charming person—one to cultivate. Her old training in being "nice" to the mothers of her high school friends stood her in good stead here. She knew how to treat older women, what sort of flattery they preferred and what sort of deference they exacted.

Always she watched for Matthew's approval. She was interested in seeing the way so many Washington women followed every step of their husbands' progress, and knew how to talk about it and how not to talk about it. She was not informed enough to get much of a grasp of big happenings, but she had an uncanny gift for getting at the pet phrases of people and never blundered as she repeated them. Then, too, she did not talk much and she read the newspapers for an hour every morning.

She was flowering, growing up, out of the little social climber she had been into the woman of social strength that she meant to be. Brilliant, colorful, utilitarian in every phase of her philosophy, except in that weakness

which showed again and again in her efforts to reach Matthew.

In February she gave her first dinner. It was a small dinner, the dozen guests chosen with the utmost care and good taste. No one was there whom she did not have the right to ask, no one who would not feel in easy company with the rest of the guests, no one who was not a person of distinction either personally or by connection. She had appealed quite frankly to Mrs. Gates for advice, on the score of youth and not wishing to appear presumptuous, and Mrs. Gates had given her exceptionally good advice.

"Don't try to do much, my dear. It's apt to irritate people, especially at the height of the season when people are crowded. All you have to do here this year is to let people know that you are here. If you want to give a small dinner, let's see (she looked at her calendar), try the third week in February."

"It's awfully good of you, Mrs. Gates, to help me. I feel so young and sometimes rather stranded because, you see, I never had to go ahead alone before. And after mother died, less than a year ago, I haven't felt much like going out or being gay. I miss her, sadly."

What was the perfect intonation which gave Mrs. Gates the idea that Fliss's mother had been her social guidance until the hour of death? She smiled at Fliss kindly, pretty Fliss who had modified her mourning so that most people did not guess it was mourning and who stood before her now, swathed in soft black furs. Her references to Fliss after that were of the kind which helped immensely.

On the night of the little dinner Matthew looked at his wife in unmixed admiration. She had come into the pretty drawing-room a little before him and he found her there. To-night, too, she was dressed in black, black

velvet which clung gently to her hips and emphasized her girlishness, yet giving her an air of dignity which he had never seen before. Her hair was changed from its Carrington arrangement. The black bang which she had clung to so long, because it was so becoming, had been sacrificed and her hair drawn straight back, showing the perfect white forehead and making her face seem more oval than before. The softest moon-white earrings and no other jewels at all.

"You're lovely, Fliss."

"I'm right," answered Fliss, with assurance. "At least I'm right as far as looks go. And the table is right. Come see it."

She led him into the paneled dining-room, where the mahogany caught the light from tall, unshaded wax tapers in their silver holders and the electric candles on the wall. The center of the table was bright with marigolds forced to a hothouse blossoming, setting off the silver and white and crystal of the whole.

"Is it right? Does it look splendid? No, not splendid, but as if we'd been giving dinners like this for years—as if our grandfathers had been doing it, too? No Peachtree or Carrington flats in the background?"

He laughed at her.

"It's so stunning, Fliss, that it almost makes me feel a bit guilty. We mustn't get so greedy for this sort of thing that we forget what I came down here for."

"You remember all that," broke in Fliss, returning to the drawing-room. "I'll remember this part."

Matthew listened to her as she stood greeting her guests with that little air of dignified deference and again as she sat opposite him, but rather far distant, listening, watching, always at work.

"Not many of your colleagues bring such young and

beautiful women to Washington as you did," commented his neighbor on the left.

Matthew smiled appreciatively.

"My wife may be my greatest contribution to Washington."

"We hear good things of you already," said the lady, who was elderly and kindly and had a fine Philadelphia manner. "But one of the best things we can hear is to hear of such devotion. It is good to see a man in love with his wife these days, Mr. Allenby."

"Do you think it's so rare?"

"I think we are creating an atmosphere in which it is harder to preserve simple emotions. I want to know your wife better and find out how she manages to be so skillful in so many things at such an early age."

"Perhaps she won't betray her secrets. But I will tell you a little. She does it because she is untiring and loves fine and beautiful things so much that she will do anything to obtain them."

"You mustn't make her seem so unscrupulous."

"Aren't charming women supposed to be unscrupulous?" asked Matthew, generalizing quickly.

"Women aren't anything they are supposed to be. Less than ever just now. They are an agglomerate mass of individuals, no one of whom and no group of whom is strong enough to set the fashion for the rest of us. But now that we vote and move more acceptedly in general circles we may develop a new feminine type. Perhaps. We've tried to in the last fifty years. We tried the bicycle riding type and the masculinized college woman and the clubwoman type and the suffragist crusader and the newer college woman who goes in for sociology and the job-holding woman who was a war growth largely—I mean the woman who holds a job because she likes work and not because she couldn't marry out of it.

Well, all those types are experiments. They aren't perfected types. The genuine old-fashioned housewife—domestic, motherly——"

"Not all of the old-fashioned women were like that," Matthew checked her up amusedly.

"Put in your dash of courtesan, if you like, young man. That's what you mean. It didn't alter the general type. Women were women, then. Now, aside from physical similarities women are not women. You used to be able to group them by something else than physical qualities. But you can't any more."

"And what's the answer?"

"Where did I start, and why did I start? My squab will be wrested from me in a minute. Wait until I have a bite."

"You started from unscrupulous women. I think your first remark was that women aren't anything they're supposed to be."

"Yes. Where I meant to end—and I can do it quickly—is to say that nothing any one can say applies to women as a class, for women no longer accept or believe in standards for themselves as a sex. They are creatures of shifting standards—unhappy or happy as the mood may strike them. They have no permanent standards."

"No standards at all?"

"Oh, some of them cling to monogamy and some to fidelity, but is it from belief and real vivifying faith or is it, as Mrs. Gerould says, because they've been passed on the ethic? Is it because it's more convenient to cling to the old fashions in morality and marriage laws? I ask it as a question. Do you know any women who would make a real sacrifice for the traditions of marriage and wifehood? Who hold those states in really reverential regard?"

Matthew was listening attentively.

"I know one woman who would," he answered, "who would make sacrifices for the old ideal. Who holds marriage in such high regard that she can offer herself on its altar if she has to."

His hearer looked down the length of the table at Fliss and smiled.

"You say that because you are in love with her," she answered. "Well, maybe you're right. But it's a queer age. I sometimes think we need a new dictionary. My grandchildren—the youngest is ten and extremely sophisticated—talk a different language from mine. It doesn't matter particularly."

A queer look had come into Matthew's eyes as the lady had assumed that his remark was a tribute to his wife.

"I can't make out whether you're a feminist or not."

"Neither can I," she returned, laughingly.

It was a perfect dinner. For so young a hostess it was marvelously well done. Matthew heard them compliment his wife, saw the elder ladies pet her and the men give her those glances of admiration which she had been used to for years. More than one man told him with unusual enthusiasm of his delightful wife, and it was not the men alone who thought so. And afterwards, as the last motor could be heard speeding away, Fliss turned to her husband.

"I've got a lot to do—a lot to learn," she said, "but I like it."

"You're a great success."

"There's such big stuff ahead," she mused. "And I'm going after it, Matthew. It gives me something to do. It's the sort of thing I can do. There's a reason for all this society. I'm going to go up to the top and find out the reason."

"That's the deepest thing you ever said," said Matthew, lighting a final cigarette. "It was a great success,"

he repeated, and went on to his library to work for a few hours. Fliss sat still, her eyes in the future as they had been long ago on the night of the High School dance. Work, heights, a future—still ahead.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE town of Allenby had grown in the five years since the birth of Dorothea Harrison in Mrs. Olson's house. It had a hotel now, a moving picture house, several emporiums, a Main Street, which was lit up by night and offered a meeting and loafing place for the people who lived there. The hotel was a square frame building, new, still fresh with paint, with kalsomined walls and hardwood floors. It called itself the best hotel in a hundred miles and was fairly accurate.

Dick lived there. It amused him at first, after the luxury of his home and his club, to walk down the resounding, uncarpeted corridor to the room which was his own with its golden oak bureau and white iron bedstead and uncomfortable rocking chair. The chair was only used as a clothes rack anyway, so it did not matter whether it was comfortable or uncomfortable. The bed was clean and comfortable and he was always grateful for that. He had made Allenby and the Allenby Hotel his headquarters because that seemed the most natural thing to do, but he did not stay there all the time. There were four or five small towns, most of them a little smaller, one larger, which were also part of his business, for they had grown up around the mines in which his company was interested, and he divided his time more or less among them all.

He had found the position very difficult. He was taking no one's place, so the organizations of the mines did not know quite what to do with him. The attitude

of the superintendents at first had been to treat him as a visitor, to "show" him things. When it came to them fully that he proposed making an extended stay among them, there was suspicion of his purposes. The undercurrent idea was at once that he was on some secret investigation, that some one was "going to be fired." They didn't like it. The simple statement which he made to them that the company had felt that a man on the ground might help the unsatisfactory situation met great skepticism. For a couple of weeks the relations were strained. But Dick made friends quickly, and what was more, he made himself useful. All of every day he was busy, going from one thing to another; talking to superintendents, foremen, men; sizing things up; listening to complaints when he must, but never encouraging them. He made no trouble, usurped no authority, did no meddling, with the result that he very soon found things brought to him for consultation and decision. Several grievances, small things in themselves, but which had been moot and bitter points between the miners and their superiors, were adjusted before they had developed so far that they made real trouble. And other things happened. Dick had consultations with some of the grocers and dealers in fuel in the towns and a certain amount of exploitation ceased as Dick pointed out that rival stores which could easily be started might put them out of business. He found out no more than the skilled investigator would have found out after a few days' survey. But the difference between Dick's work and that of a professional investigator was that Dick did something about it. He was not only investigating and observing, but he had, in a large measure, power to act and the brains to proceed.

These small successes gave him no illusions any more than his small failures confused his mind. He knew

that the great dissatisfactions would not be solved by even model conditions, and model conditions were impossible to get. But he worked along and even garnered unexpected praise from that hard-thinking group of men who had allowed him permission to try his experiment.

It was a very simple life. All day at the mines, absorbed in study of practical things, varied perhaps in some way by a discussion with some of the foremen or some of the men themselves. He was amazed to find how hard every one was thinking. Nearly every man he met had some idea that changes were needed in mind, state or nation. He heard wise comments often as well as ridiculous ones, but he found no common basis for all the comments—nothing to build upon—no standard which they all would follow. He puzzled about it somewhat. At the end of the day, in the short evenings, he thought of these things, sometimes sitting in the unkempt lobby of the hotel, sometimes walking swiftly in the cold night. And as he walked he would see lights come out from the windows of the little houses and shadows pass the windows, and he would be very lonely. More lonely than he had been in Carrington, for he felt closer to these houses and yet shut out from them. He had the sense of men behind the windows, with their families—men basically like himself, women fundamentally like Cecily. And as he walked he often wondered, too, what it was that had parted him and Cecily again on that Christmas morning, why they could not have been happy together. Sometimes it seemed so cruelly abnormal to him that he was tempted to go to her again. Things looked simpler here in this little streetcarless, snow covered, hard driven town. Men were husbands and women were wives, and mental quibbles were of such little consequence. In these clear moments of normality it was amazing to him that he and Cecily had ever quar-

reled. She, the beautiful, loyal mother of his children; he, her husband, devoted to his children and loving Cecily so deeply. And yet there it was. In some way they had torn their marriage into shreds. Because she did not want him to like the things, the people, the amusements which she did not like; because she had rated him cheap and held herself dear; because she had insisted on her standards for both of them.

Trivialities, no doubt of it. They had thrown away vital things for trivialities. They'd won their points. He might go where he liked, amuse himself as he liked, live by his own standards. And where was he? A man without a home, without a family; and yet always with the precious sense of that family, his even though he was not with it. And she—he could imagine her sitting quietly in that long living-room of hers, with her book—alone. Or was she? Matthew had said it could not go on that way; that some man was bound to disturb Cecily. Cecily's husband put that thought from his mind with distaste.

He came to the conclusion that they must have been living in a queer atmosphere, to let themselves be ruined by such mental abnormalities. No standards. Or was that the root of the trouble—Cecily's standards? Cecily's standards which had seemed when he married her to be so wonderfully beautiful and which had become so irritating, so inflexible, so rigid. They had set her apart from so many people. She had preserved them at such great cost.

Now, with the jazz fever out of his blood, with the cold air on his cheeks, Dick could see how he might have taught Cecily tolerance. She had learned many other things. But it was too late now for that. They had hurt each other too cruelly. Humiliated each other; and he had added a cruel touch of further humiliation on

Christmas. At the thought of Christmas Dick always stopped thinking. He couldn't bear to go on with the picture of himself that he imagined Cecily saw of him, sneaking home on a holiday, a sentimental, desirous, quarrelsome brute.

In a kind of debauch of lonesomeness, he used to think of other things about Cecily—of the way she used to tuck the little baby under her chin like a fiddle—of the way she looked with her hair spread out on her pillow. But it rested him. He would look back and remember little things which had seemed of no consequence, but now were comforting and sweet. She had loved him. He must persuade her to let him do something for the boys—settle something on her.

Then he would go to bed and get up to an immense day's work.

In late February he ran in to Carrington for a week to straighten out things at the office and fight out some matters which weren't being given the attention he wanted them to have. He was going back to the mines for another couple of months.

"I want to see the situation through the winter. Next winter I'll know better how to go about things up there, even if it must be done at longer range."

"Going to establish the millennium?" asked one of the directors, trying to "kid" Dick a bit.

Dick gave him a queer look.

"There's no millennium coming for a damned long time yet," he answered. "But we may save a lot of money and, what's more, a lot of skins by finding out just what is going on up there."

They praised his work in giving him greater leeway and full power to do what he thought best in dismissals and appointments.

He met Walter at lunch and asked after Della.

"Not too well," said Walter, "but that's part of it, I suppose."

"Hurrah for you," said Dick, "I didn't know about it."

"It makes a man feel helpless, doesn't it?" asked Walter.

Dick nodded.

"Cecily has been a wonder to Della. She's seen a lot of her and sort of bolstered her up."

"Cecily?"

"Della turned to her more than to any one else. She was a little panicky, you know."

"Cecily could help her out a lot," said Dick shortly, and was on his way.

He had one other encounter. He had come in to Car-rington just at this time because he had known that Matthew was on for three days from Washington. He had not known that seeing Matthew meant dining with Fliss at the hotel. But it did.

She was looking as pretty as ever, even somehow prettier, and she had a better manner. Still in apparent mourning, she would not dance, but she regaled Dick with tales of Washington which kept them all amused, and Dick enjoyed her as he had not enjoyed anybody since his break with Cecily. She spoke of that when Matthew had gone to find her coat and get a taxi. She was going to pay some calls while Dick and Matthew talked business.

"How is Cecily?" she asked Dick, the corner of her eyes lifted toward him.

"I don't know."

"You aren't living there?"

"No."

"Don't stiffen, Dick. I don't mean to pry. I'm really sorry."

"Thank you."

"You're a fool, Dick."

"Which way?"

"Trying to get along without her. You can't. Nobody seems to be able to. Here's your little sister-in-law adoring her. Here's Matthew much the same. Here's you, the same, though she irritates you a little just as she does me. I confess I'm exempt. I don't adore. But I never did fall for the good wife and mother type."

"Change the subject, Fliss."

"No, I won't, Dick. I'll say my say. I'll say that you and your good wife ought to get together—if only for that blessed Dorothea's sake. I suppose Cecily wouldn't let me have Dorothea? I helped bring her into the world. Well, maybe I can send her an anonymous present once in a while. Dick, did you ever like me?"

"I wonder just how much," teased Dick.

"Cecily and I have always been jealous of each other, you know. I suppose that when we are old and gray and wear caps (only I mean to Marcel mine to the end), that we will still be jealous of the parts of our husbands' minds we haven't got. Cecily has a lot of Matthew's (the best part of it, too) and I have a tiny scrap of yours which she begrudges me. But she can't have it, Dick. I cling to it. She can have most of you, but I want the tiny scrap of you that wants brighter color than Cecily will give you. So there!"

She finished with her old impudent smile.

"Foolish woman!" he said.

"Foolish nothing. I'm a working woman these days with no time for foolishness. I'm storming Washington society. And as Matthew goes up and up I shall trail along after him. Just talking of you, darling," she finished as Matthew came in sight.

Dick spent a few dutiful days with his mother, repressing her efforts to repeat to him the gossip about

his affairs and just as definitely refusing to hear or talk ill of Cecily. Mrs. Harrison wanted him to make some effort to get Dorothea for her. But he refused.

"Dorothea is better with her mother."

"You never know. Cecily will probably get some notion to put the child into a convent."

"Nonsense, mother."

But he had to hold himself rather sternly in check as he found himself trying to keep away from his old house. He had a very definite ache for the children. He wanted just to see them, but he really couldn't hang around street corners, he told himself. Finally, on the day he left, he telephoned the house. It was relief when Ellen answered. He had decided to hang up if it was Cecily's voice.

"It's Mr. Harrison, Ellen. No, I didn't want to speak to Mrs. Harrison. It's all right that she's out. I'm leaving town in a few minutes and I was wondering if you could bring Dorothea down to the train. And Leslie? It isn't far. Mrs. Harrison has the baby with her? Then, if you could—fine, fine, fine. I'll send you home in a taxi. Can't I send a taxi for you? All right, in half an hour, then."

He was trembling when he saw the children come down the platform, Dorothea so competent now, Leslie tumbling along like a small brown bear. Such wonderful children! He had not had time for toys, but he had raided a confectioner's.

"Are you going away again, daddy?"

"I must, dear. I have work to do. You must be a good girl and mind mother."

"I do."

"Mrs. Harrison well, Ellen?"

"Yes, Mr. Harrison. I'm sure she'll be sorry you can't come for dinner."

"Trying to keep us respectable, Ellen?" Dick chuckled, but his laughter was a little husky.

"Better come out with us," urged Ellen with unusual boldness.

Dick shrank instinctively.

"Wouldn't do—wouldn't do at all. Too bad, Ellen, but it's too late for that. Remember what you promised; let me know if Mrs. Harrison ever needs me. Good-by, Leslie, old chunk; good-by, Dorothea, my darling."

Ellen took them off reluctantly and Dick jumped on his train—a train of daycoaches, perambulated by boys with "popcorn, chewing gum and candy." He felt like a tramp, and sitting slouched up beside his window, pulled his cap over his eyes. Homeless. What did it matter if he was rich and equipped with power? He was homeless. A wave of bitterness towards his wife swept over him. There were Walter and his Della, waiting for their child; Fliss with her Matthew; Cecily and he—separated.

"I must work," he told himself. "I must work like hell."

That was what he did, what he had to do. He was hardly back in Allenby before trouble broke out. The long winter had worn on every one. Nerves which could not be sent to Florida for rehabilitation were none the less shattered in dirty-faced miners and their stolid seeming wives. Professional agitators; a long list of impossible demands; poor whiskey obtained from the blind pigs; an official firing an unwary shot; other angry shots; the old story of the strike and its outcome. Dick toiled night and day now, using every ounce of influence he had gained, doing the things which must be done in every strike; trying to keep sparks from the inflammable bitterness, fighting, losing, winning a little, seeing privation and trouble face to face as he had never seen it.

It took him out of his own trouble, but while the men in Carrington congratulated themselves on their foresight in having "Harrison on the job up there," Dick changed rather visibly. His step did not have so much spring and the youth which he had carried so blithely in his face until this age of thirty-seven seemed quite gone.

CHAPTER XXIX

CECILY was home when Ellen brought the children back from the train.

"Where have you all been?" she asked, pulling Leslie's cap off and patting the rosy, wind-blown cheeks.

Ellen looked at her squarely.

"Mr. Harrison telephoned that he was leaving town and would like to see the children. So I took them down to the train."

A flush came over Cecily's face.

"You took them to the train without my permission?"

"Their father telephoned me that he would like me to," answered Ellen, continuing to take off Dorothea's wraps in the utmost calmness.

There was something in Ellen's assumption which it was impossible to circumvent. There was no answer. He was their father; he had asked to see them; she had no right to prevent it; the thoughts skimmed through Cecily's mind, disturbed as she was. She said nothing further. Dorothea was full of embarrassing comments on her father that Cecily did not want to hear, but it was impossible to divert her. For several days Dorothea was determined to talk of her father and could not be thrown off the track. It seemed to Cecily that it would be outrageous to forbid her such talk, but she did not like it.

She had come to see the difficulties of continuing in her present relations with Dick. It could hardly go on. Some arrangement would have to be made to clear up

the vagueness of the situation. She was disagreeably conscious of the lurking feeling among her relatives that Dick and she would "make it up," and that, she felt angrily, made her position intolerably cheap. It wasn't a thing which could be "made up." In those moments when she did toss over in her restless mind the possibilities of living with Dick again, the thought of the smiles of people over the "reconciliation" was intensely irritating. Della had tried to urge her to take some step to see Dick, but gentle as she was with Della these days, Cecily would not allow her to go on.

Yet she was learning from Della. Learning the strangest things from Della's pragmatic little soul. Walter was always asking her to come to see them, to join them here and there and it was so good to be wanted that Cecily saw the young Warners often. At first the demonstrations of affection she used to witness bothered her, shamed her delicacies. But she grew used to them and quite tolerant. One couldn't do away with Dellas. Why shouldn't she kiss her husband in public if she liked? What difference did it make? They cared for each other and when Della would pout and grow angry and Walter get angry in return, Cecily grew used to seeing them, for no reason at all, give up the quarrel in favor of a caress. No long silences, no quiet bitternesses. No one made his point in these little quarrels, but what did that matter either? They weren't points worth making.

Cecily had noted through the papers the return of Fliss for those few days. It had been evidently quite a social triumph. The entertaining for her had been very quiet in deference to Fliss's mourning. Cecily heard that with a quick, ironic memory of the day she had visited Fliss's mother.

Once she spoke of Fliss to Ellen.

"Your cousin has become very important."

"She was always a hard worker," returned Ellen.

Cecily looked at her skeptically.

"Oh, yes, in her way. She's really a very hard worker. Of course she likes things pretty and gay, but I will say this for her. She was always willing to work for what she got. And she knew what she wanted from the time she was a little thing."

But Cecily felt no tolerance there—no tolerance towards Fliss. Fliss was to her the waste of the world—the corruption of the times—with whom there must be no truce.

Her money affairs were still in a bad way. There had been expensive house repairing; there had been clothes for the children and Cecily could not bear to put them into cheaper things than they had been accustomed to wear. The fact that money which she would not use had been put to her credit made the situation half-ridiculous. She was conscious of looking a little ridiculous. As the standards for marriage which she had held so sacredly grew a little less rigid because of her friendliness with Della, she used to wonder more and more why she had let things matter so much between herself and Dick. So many things might have been passed over. "But I wouldn't like to live like Della," she'd tell herself. "It's all right for Della to squabble and caress; our marriage was different." And back again she would come to the old point that Dick had preferred casual amusements to her, that he had not been willing to concede that hers was the highest way. Though she might concede some things she was still sure of one fact: that hers was the highest way. It wasn't, she would tell herself in these intense mental discussions, that she wanted Dick to stay in every night, that she didn't want him to dance—to play. She only wanted him to stand with her mentally on a height of marriage to which they had attained at least in

those early days; she didn't want their union to mix on a common basis with these haphazard marriages of passion, of convenience, marriages of deliberate childlessness—which she saw around her. How he was to express his mental agreement with her she didn't know; how he could have expressed it she could dream; but she knew that he never could feel or express it now. For they had put themselves in the quarreling class. Even if they lived together again they could not get the perfection they had missed. Resentment would be casting shadows between them for a while and, when resentment died at last, with it would die some delicacies, some memories. When the memories of these months of bitterness and separation faded, were they together or apart, some capacities for feeling would have faded, too.

And yet the bond remained between them. After she had proved to herself that living with Dick now would be an admission of failure, her mental house of cards always tumbled. During the night she would waken and be looking into blackness, clearly conscious that her marriage was as alluring and commanding as ever, facing simple, elemental lonelines and desires. Rightness and wrongness of the issues did not matter much in these moments; in so far as they did it occurred to her that her little unbending scrupulosities about standards cut shabby figures besides unscrupulous, unprejudiced love. Even if he had been faithless—even if there had been another woman whom he loved—even then the bond would have remained. It was cemented in her soul by her memories—in her outer life by her children.

She was almost ready for her half-loaf.

Matthew wrote to her in March. He had not seen her when he was in Carrington and wrote to tell her why—a dangerously frank letter for a Senator.

"I thought it best not to come because I did not want to mix issues. What I wanted to say to you as I thought of going to you was to urge you to return to Dick—to have him return to you. But perhaps what I might say if I came into your presence would not be that. So I write instead, for as I write I can think of you simply. I have thought often of you and Dick. You are both very dear to me. In the curious quadrangle of our lives there have been strange attractions. But accidents of place have almost destroyed the quadrangle and I think it should end in a real understanding between you and Dick. You can't love anybody but Dick, Cecily, and you can love him much more if you watch him more, if you see that under a certain natural mannishness there is a spirit that probes into things as does yours. I don't think you will ever regret going back to Dick—I speak of it as going back, but I mean going to him—but I know that you will shrivel and waste your life if you do not.

"You have made heights real to us. Don't make it hard for Dick because he can't live on them. Live on the plains where most of the work of the world is done, live with the people who do it—and watch the heights from your window.

"I am sending you my love and I am proud as I do it."

Cecily read his letter on a windy day in early March. She put it into the pocket of her coat and went out for a walk. As she passed the convent the open gates seemed to beckon to her. She went in and stealing down the corridor to the chapel door, sat as she had sat years ago on the ledge of the window opposite the statue of the Virgin. She remembered how frightened and allured she had been by the talk about marriage. "An institution for the establishment of a home and the bringing up of children." That, her heart cried out; yes, that, but so much

more, so infinitely much more A shrine for the love of man and woman—a shrine which she had somehow desecrated!

Her thoughts tormented her. Hither and thither they tossed her. She turned towards the door of the convent and asked for Mother Fénelon. Mother Fénelon took her hands from under her black robe and placed them on Cecily's shoulders.

"Still in trouble, Cecily?"

Cecily nodded.

"Are you living with your husband?"

She shook her head.

"Go to him, my dear——"

"Don't," cried Cecily. "Don't, please."

It was late afternoon but she did not go home. She walked to the park and sat on a bench and felt like an outcast as the evening shadows fell around her. It grew darker and people went past her going home—carrying bundles, hurrying. Motors slipped by carrying other people home. What was home? She didn't have one. She and Dick didn't have one. They were kept apart by shadows, kept apart because they couldn't get close enough. It grew colder. She looked at her watch. The children would have had their supper. She should go home. But she felt as if she must do something definite first. Still she was not quite sure what it was that she must do.

At last she rose unsteadily and made her way to a corner drugstore. It was deserted at the supper hour. Cecily saw her face as she looked across the counter into the glass, reddened with wind, streaked with tears (she hadn't been conscious of crying) and her hat was askew. She asked the clerk for change and went into the telephone booth.

"I shan't be home for supper, Ellen—nor all night. I'm going to Allenby. Can you manage?"

The other call was to get Dick's exact address.

It was eleven o'clock when she toiled up from the station to the hotel, and it took more courage than she had known she had left to face the clerk and ask for Mr. Allenby's room.

The clerk looked very dubious.

"I'm Mrs. Allenby," said Cecily, pushing a card across at him. "I'll go right up. Evidently," she lied, "he didn't get my telegram."

"Very well, Mrs. Allenby," said the clerk, still with a trace of dubiousness in his manner.

What had Cecily the immaculate, the fastidious, come to, to be toiling up these noisy stairs at eleven o'clock at night in search of her husband? Baggageless, shrinking from the curious looks of the few lounge loafers.

If she could only have crept in in the darkness. But she must knock and a woman at the other end of the hall was turning to look. Dick was hard to rouse.

"Let me in," said Cecily, hoarsely. She did not know her own voice.

Nor did he. She could hear him lighting the gas, coming to the door, opening it.

She fairly pushed him aside so that she could get in.

"Cecily! For God's sake, what's the matter?"

She looked at him gravely, her eyes flaring in her white face.

"I don't know," she said. "I don't know what was the matter. I must have been right. Don't you see I must have been right. All I wanted was right things. But that doesn't make any difference. I want you home. I came up—I came up—because I'm your wife." And she tumbled over in a desolate worn-out little heap at his feet.

CHAPTER XXX

IT will be like another wedding trip, darling," said Dick tenderly, and hurried out to make some final arrangements. The motor with the children had just moved away and Cecily sat in her compartment in the train and waited for her husband. He was taking her away for a few months on the advice of every one, to dull some ugly memories, to rest her and give people a chance to forget that there had ever been "trouble." Not that people took that trouble very seriously. They smiled a good deal over it.

It seemed like a dream, thought Cecily. She had learned in the past few weeks to take comments casually, to listen to the sentimental I-told-you-sos, to even listen to the jesting, jesting about the storm which had been the great storm of her life. There would never be another one, she thought. She had learned too much for that. It was good to know how to avoid storms, to have Dick back, to have again the sense of normality, to love and be loved.

Another wedding trip, he had said. So he meant it. He was rapidly getting over the sense of difficulty between them. His wife was more pliable and he was starvedly grateful for her affection. He would have said that "they both had learned a lesson." But, as Cecily looked quietly out of the window, she knew it was not another wedding trip. Not because the mysteries were gone, but because her belief—or was it illusion—that life

between them would be all love, all fine devotion, all delicate tenderness, was gone.

It could not be that now. Something—the raucous spirit of the times, the noisy unbelief of the age, or perhaps her own cloistral spirit—had ruined that first belief. But her marriage would go on and she was going on with it. Not passively, but actively.

Going on with marriage. Because it was her business to go on with her husband, with her children—even if she must make concessions.

Idly, to still her thoughts, she opened the magazine lying on her lap. From the page before her a full length picture of Fliss stared up at her and the caption seemed to leap at Cecily in capital letters.

“The beautiful Mrs. Allenby, wife of Senator Allenby, who has been such a success in Washington this season, relies for her success not only on her beauty but on her intellect. Mrs. Allenby has studied the modern woman’s problems deeply. She says that the modern marriage——”

Cecily closed the book with disgust. The old spirit was aflame again—resentment that this sort of thing should be tolerated, that marriage should be made so cheap. She half pushed the magazine out of the window to drop it to the tracks below.

Then she pulled it back and, looking at it thoughtfully for a moment, laid it down beside her to show to Dick.

THE END

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